



DISEASES AND CONDITIONS

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Graves' disease

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Causes

Normally, your immune system uses naturally occurring proteins (antibodies) and white blood cells (lymphocytes) to help eliminate viruses, bacteria and foreign substances (antigens) that invade your body.

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Thyroid gland

In Graves' disease, your immune system mistakenly attacks your thyroid gland, but instead of destroying the gland, an antibody called thyrotropin receptor antibody (TRAb) stimulates the thyroid to make excessive amounts of thyroid hormone.

Your thyroid is part of your endocrine system, which includes a collection of glands and tissues that produce hormones. These chemical messengers coordinate many of your body's activities, from digestion to metabolism to reproduction. Thyroxine — a hormone produced by the thyroid — controls your metabolic rate.

Doctors don't know the cause of Graves' disease, what may lead your immune system to attack your thyroid gland. However, they believe a combination of factors, including heredity, sex, age and stress, may determine your likelihood of developing Graves' disease.

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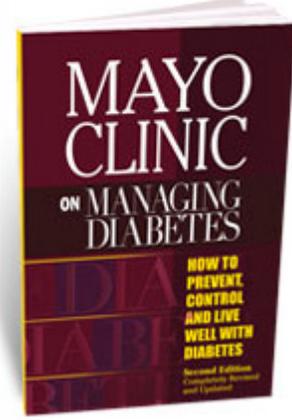
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By Mayo Clinic Staff

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