

Understanding Thyroid Eye Disease

About 25-50% of people who have Grave's disease develop thyroid eye disease.

1 Introduction

Thyroid eye disease (TED) — also known as Grave's eye disease — is a thyroid autoimmune disorder where the eye muscles and tissue around the eye become inflamed. This inflammation can cause the eyes to “bulge” or cause swollen eyelids. TED is most common in people diagnosed with Grave's Disease or autoimmune thyroid disease, though it can appear in those with normal or low thyroid levels.

2 Symptoms

The bulging eyes and swollen eyelids caused by TED can lead to double vision in some patients. Other symptoms may include:

- Dry or watery eyes
- Low tolerance for bright lights
- Pain in or behind the eye
- Red eyes
- Difficulty completely closing eyes
- Gritty feeling eyes

Symptoms of TED can vary from mild to severe, but usually get better over time. However, more severe cases can leave patients with permanent conditions.

3 Diagnosis

Though many patients develop TED from Grave's disease, that isn't the main part of the diagnosis. Usually, a TED diagnosis comes from a patient listing symptoms of TED or some symptoms being noticed in a regular eye exam. Afterward, there are usually some blood tests to check thyroid levels as well as possible eye ultrasounds, computed tomography, or magnetic resonance imaging to confirm a diagnosis.

4 Treatments

Medications can be used to treat some of the symptoms, but other non-medicine related treatments include:

- Wear sunglasses if you're sensitive to sunlight
- Use lubricating eye drops for dry eyes
- Relieve eye pressure by elevating the head of your bed
- Reduce the effects of double vision with prism eyeglasses

If the inflammation and bulging eyes become permanent, there are a few surgeries that can be performed to resolve those effects.

Did you know?

Thyroid eye disease is more common in women (16 in 100,000) but can still affect men (around 3 in 100,000).

For more information on Grave's eye disease and supportive resources, please visit www.nei.nih.gov/graves-eye-disease

References:

<https://www.pennmedicine.org/for-patients-and-visitors/find-a-program-or-service/ophthalmology/thyroid-eye-disease-graves-disease>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK582134/>

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<https://www.thyroid.org/graves-eye-disease/>