

MEDIA RELEASE

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‘The Many Faces of the Thyroid’: Why Aussies are being urged to “check your neck” this May

- Approximately 60,000 new cases of thyroid disease are diagnosed each year in Australia.
 - *Women are ten times more likely than men to be diagnosed with a thyroid disorder.*
 - *An estimated 1 million Australians may be living with an undiagnosed thyroid condition.*

As it marks the start of this year’s Thyroid Awareness Month, the Australian Thyroid Foundation Ltd (ATF) is calling on all Australians to be more aware of their thyroid health during the month of May and to see their doctor for thyroid testing.

“In Australia, each year during May, we recognise Thyroid Awareness Month - an important opportunity to raise awareness and understanding of thyroid disorders, including thyroid cancer”, said Chief Executive Officer of the ATF, Ms Beverley Garside.

“This is particularly important as thyroid disorders can be difficult to diagnose, due to the common nature of the symptoms, which can often be associated with other medical conditions”, said Ms Garside.

Thyroid disorders have a large range of symptoms, depending on the type of thyroid condition a person may have. Symptoms can include weight loss or weight gain, sweating or dry skin, diarrhoea or constipation and fatigue or depression.

The theme for this year’s Thyroid Awareness Month is ***‘The many faces of the thyroid’***, which aims to highlight the different types of thyroid conditions people may have. These include an overactive thyroid (known as hyperthyroidism or Graves’ disease), an underactive thyroid (known as hypothyroidism or Hashimoto’s disease), thyroid cancer, congenital hypothyroidism, thyroid nodules and iodine deficiency.

“Thyroid disease doesn’t discriminate and can affect people of all ages and in different ways, with more than 60,000 new cases diagnosed in Australia each year. Yet, it’s likely there are more than one million Australians who are living with an undiagnosed thyroid condition”, Ms Garside said.

“It’s important that Australians don’t ignore their symptoms and see their doctor for a full thyroid work up, including blood tests and a thyroid ultrasound, so they are able to get a correct diagnosis.

“At the same time, it is critical that doctors listen to their patients and use thyroid testing to eliminate a possible thyroid disorder, rather than diagnosing their symptoms as mental health issues, advancing age or menopause”, Ms Garside continued.

The thyroid gland is located at the front of the neck, below the voice box. As part of the endocrine system, the thyroid plays a critical role in the healthy functioning of the body, influencing and regulating the activity of all cells and tissues. A healthy thyroid gland uses ingested iodine from iodine enriched foods to produce thyroid hormones which regulate body and brain growth and development, body temperature, energy levels and metabolic functions.

“Women are ten times more likely than men to develop a thyroid condition. For pregnant women or those who are trying to conceive, it is vital that thyroid testing and adequate levels of iodine supplementation are taken to avoid complications such as infertility or diminished foetal growth and development”, said Ms Garside.

“I encourage all Australians to ‘check your neck’ this month and be aware of their thyroid health. People know their own bodies, and if something doesn’t seem right, then please see your doctor for a correct diagnosis”, Ms Garside concluded.

May is Thyroid Awareness Month in Australia, which incorporates World Thyroid Day (25 May) and International Thyroid Awareness Week (25-31 May).

For more information, or to support the ATF, please visit: www.thyroidfoundation.org.au

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About thyroid disease

The thyroid gland is a soft, small bow-shaped gland, located in the front of the neck, below the voice box or larynx (Adam’s Apple) on either side of the trachea (windpipe). Thyroid disease is usually caused by an autoimmune disease, which affects more women than men. Iodine deficiency is the most common worldwide cause of thyroid disorders. Along with auto-immune thyroid disease, a low iodine diet can cause hypothyroidism, an enlarged thyroid gland (goitre) and can affect fertility, pregnancy outcomes and foetal brain development.

About the Australian Thyroid Foundation

The Australian Thyroid Foundation Ltd (ATF) was founded in 1995 and is now the peak advocacy and support organisation for Australians living with a thyroid disorder. The ATF is a national not-for-profit organisation with a focus on providing education and support to its members and promoting Good Thyroid Health messaging throughout the community. The ATF is a member of Thyroid Federation International (TFI), a world-wide thyroid patient organisation dedicated to global action of thyroid related issues.