

DEFINITION

1. **Thyroiditis** is the term given to inflammation of the thyroid gland. It may bring about a disturbance of thyroid function.

CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS

2. The clinical picture varies considerably. The commonest feature is pain in the area of the thyroid gland, and there may also be swelling of the gland (goitre) of varying consistency. Fever is present in acute, and usually in subacute, thyroiditis.

CLASSIFICATION

3. There are many different varieties of thyroiditis:
 - 3.1 Acute pyogenic.
 - 3.2 Subacute granulomatous (De Quervain's).
 - 3.3 Chronic atrophic (primary myxoedema).
 - 3.4 Hashimoto's disease.
 - 3.5 Chronic fibrous (Reidel's).
 - 3.6 Silent, painless thyroiditis (with thyrotoxicosis).
 - 3.7 Post-partum.

The various types of thyroiditis are notable for their different clinical courses and for the fact that each can be associated, at one time or another, with a euthyroid, thyrotoxic, or hypothyroid state.

AETIOLOGY

4. **Viruses.** Viral infection is the cause of **subacute thyroiditis**. Several different viruses are known to be implicated, namely mumps, adenovirus cocksackie, echovirus and influenza.
5. **Bacteria** cause acute, pyogenic thyroiditis. The condition is rare. It includes pneumocystis carinii infection of the thyroid in AIDS patients.
6. **Autoimmune disease.** This is regarded as the basis of most types of chronic thyroiditis, but no specific environmental triggers have been identified. Hashimoto's disease is known to coexist frequently with other autoimmune disorders.

7. The body's immune system provides an essential barrier to a large range of pathogenic organisms. **Autoimmune disease** occurs if the immune network response becomes directed at the body itself rather than at foreign antigens, and thereby causes damage to the body's tissues.
8. Most work on autoimmune disease and its mechanisms have been done in animals. Despite recent advances in the molecular biology of the immune response, the precise aetiology of autoimmune disease remains unknown. In humans genetic factors are thought to play a part. This is supported by studies of familial aggregation of the conditions, and high concordance in monozygotic twins. However concordance is not complete and therefore genetic factors alone are insufficient for disease to develop.
9. Environmental factors which have been postulated as producing disease in predisposed individuals include infection (viral and bacterial), drugs and toxins. However positive identification of specific factors in the individual conditions and cases is very rare.
10. Individuals with one autoimmune disease (such as Hashimoto's) appear to be at increased risk of other autoimmune conditions. These further conditions do not arise as a consequence of the first, rather the common factor is the genetic predisposition.

CONCLUSION

11. **Thyroiditis** is the name given to inflammation of the thyroid gland. There are several clinical types, most of which are due to **autoimmune disease**.

REFERENCES

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