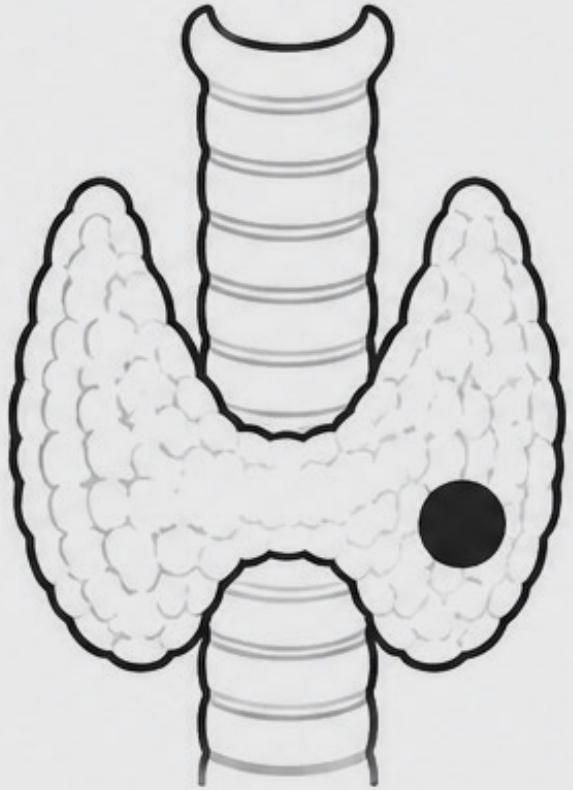




National University  
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# Understanding Your CT Scan Results

## A Guide to Incidental Findings – Thyroid

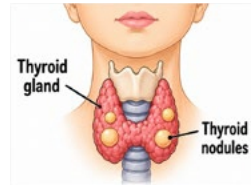
# What is an incidental finding?

Sometimes, when doctors take pictures of your chest (called a CT scan), they spot something that wasn't the reason for the scan. This is called an incidental finding. Think of it like having your photo taken and someone noticing something in the background. Most of the time, these findings are harmless, but your doctor wants to make sure you know about them and get any help you might need.

## Thyroid Nodule

### At a glance summary:

- The **thyroid gland** is a butterfly-shaped gland at the front of your neck that makes hormones to help your body work properly.
- A **nodule** is a small lump of cells found inside the gland. These are very common and most are harmless.
- You have been given this leaflet because a small nodule has been found in your thyroid gland. In most cases, this is not a cause for concern. However, as CT scans are not the best test for assessing thyroid nodules, your doctor may recommend further investigations. Please see below for more detailed information.



### What was found?

A small lump (called a nodule) was found in your thyroid gland. This is a butterfly-shaped gland that sits at the front of your neck. It helps control many aspects of your body's function, like your energy levels and heart rate.

### Is it serious?

Most thyroid nodules are harmless. A small proportion may be cancerous; however, thyroid cancers are typically slow-growing and treatable, particularly when detected early. A CT scan alone cannot reliably determine whether a nodule is cancerous, which is why additional tests may sometimes be recommended.

*Please tell your doctor if you have had radiation treatment to your neck, or if anyone in your family has had thyroid cancer as this affects your risk levels.*

### **What about symptoms?**

Most people do not experience any symptoms. Occasionally, a larger nodule may cause a visible lump in the neck, a hoarse voice, or difficulty swallowing. Some nodules produce too much thyroid hormone, which may lead to symptoms such as a racing heart, weight loss, or feeling unusually warm. If you have any of these symptoms, please tell your doctor. You may need to take a thyroid blood test, and in some cases, referral to a specialist.

### **What happens next?**

A CT scan is not the best test for assessing the thyroid gland or thyroid nodules. An ultrasound scan provides a more accurate assessment and may be recommended by your doctor. Ultrasound is a simple, painless test that uses sound waves to examine the thyroid gland and nodule in more detail.

For nodules smaller than 1cm with no worrisome features, the risk of cancer is very low. For larger nodules the risk may be higher, and your doctor may refer you to a specialist. Depending on the ultrasound findings, you may be advised to have a biopsy. This is a procedure where a small needle is inserted into the thyroid gland to get a small sample of cells and help further diagnose your condition. In other cases, repeated ultrasound monitoring may be required.

### **What if I choose not to go ahead with further testing?**

Your doctor can discuss your individual level of risk based on the results available so far. For smaller thyroid nodules, the chance of missing a serious problem is low, and many people will remain well without further testing. However, some people may later go on to be diagnosed with a thyroid cancer and it could progress over time.

It is important that you understand the potential risks and benefits of further testing so that you can make an informed decision about how you would like to proceed.

*This leaflet is a guide only. Your doctor will advise on what is most appropriate for your individual situation. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions.*

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