The Phases of Thyroid Eye Disease

Learn about the progression of healthy eyes to the acute and chronic phases of thyroid eye disease

What is thyroid eye disease (TED)?
TED is an autoimmune condition that causes your immune cells to attack the healthy skin and tissue around and behind your eyes.

If you have a thyroid condition and are experiencing eye symptoms, you may have TED.

What are the phases of TED?

Healthy eye

This is the symptomatic or acute phase.

Eye in the active phase of TED

The active phase can last anywhere from 6 months to 2 years. Symptoms can be in both eyes, or one can be more severe than the other. Treatment to relieve symptoms begins in this phase.

• Double vision, bulging eyes and eyelid retraction can still be present in this phase.
• Healthcare providers tend to recommend surgery in the inactive phase, once inflammation has decreased, unless there’s concern for loss of vision.

Eye in the inactive phase of TED

This is the chronic phase.

The symptoms of TED are often mistaken for allergies or other conditions.

What you need to know if you have TED

The symptoms of TED are often mistaken for allergies or other conditions.

If you have TED, you will need to seek care from a specialist, such as an ophthalmologist, neuro-ophthalmologist or oculoplastic surgeon.

While TED isn’t considered to be curable, there are treatments that can help manage your symptoms.

Talk with your healthcare provider if you have concerns about your thyroid or eye health. Since TED symptoms can worsen over time, it’s important to be diagnosed early so treatment can begin right away.

TED is also known as Graves’ ophthalmopathy or Graves’ Eye Disease because 9 in 10 people with TED have Graves’ disease.

Graves’ disease causes immune cells to attack the thyroid, typically causing hyperthyroidism, a condition where the thyroid gland produces too much thyroid hormone.

Less common, TED can happen to people who have hyperthyroidism without Graves’ or have hypothyroidism, a condition where the thyroid doesn’t produce enough thyroid hormone.

Graves’ disease and TED both happen when the immune system attacks healthy body tissues.

With Graves’ disease, your immune system attacks the thyroid gland. With TED, your immune system attacks the tissue in or around the eye. It’s possible to have one condition without the other.

About 1 in 4 people with Graves’ disease have symptoms of TED.

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Graves’ disease is caused by the thyroid gland producing too much thyroid hormone.

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