My thyroid is bigger on one side. Is this normal?

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Every second, Americans ask the internet whether their health is “normal.”

The problem is that the answers they get can be terribly misleading. And that can be dangerous.

For example, if you search, “My thyroid is bigger on one side—is this normal?”, you could come away thinking you have thyroid cancer when you really don’t. Or you could conclude it’s a normal anatomical variation when really you need to have it looked at. Don’t do this to yourself.

The core issue is that the internet doesn’t know you—your medical history, your family history or your lifestyle. But there’s good news: Your doctor does. The American Medical Association (AMA) encourages everyone to talk to their doctor before acting on health information they find online.

Many causes, not all for concern

The thyroid gland sits in the front of the neck, just above the collarbone. Its purpose is to make thyroid hormones using iodine. Thyroid hormone increases metabolism and function of almost every cell in the human body.

Thyroid nodules develop when thyroid cells grow into a small lump. Some nodules are solid, and some contain fluid. If a nodule only contains fluid, it is called a cyst.

URL: https://patients.ama-assn.org/public-health/prevention-wellness/my-thyroid-bigger-one-side-normal

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A thyroid nodule is different from a goiter. A goiter is when the entire thyroid gland becomes enlarged. It can be a general enlargement or contain multiple smaller nodules. They have many causes, including:

- Graves' disease.
- Hashimoto's disease.
- Inflammation.
- Iodine deficiency.
- Pregnancy.
- Thyroid cancer.
- Thyroid nodules.

With so many potential causes of an asymmetric thyroid, it's impossible to say without a formal diagnosis, in a doctor's office, whether it's a normal anatomical variation, a potentially cancerous growth or a goiter.

If you have a thyroid nodule, it is important for you to see your doctor for an initial examination. The first step is usually blood tests to assess how much thyroid hormone is being produced. Your physician may ask you to see a specialist for more advice.

Rely on your doctor for direction

It is important to remember that thyroid nodules are extremely common, especially as we age. But some, if not treated, can be life threatening. So don't ignore an enlarged thyroid, but also don't try to diagnose it on your own. Ask your doctor.

When you do see your doctor, don't hold back. Mention any other symptoms you have, even if they might seem to have nothing to do with your thyroid nodule. For example, are you having difficulty breathing or swallowing? Mention it. Have you had hoarseness or voice changes? Mention it. Are you feeling that your shirt collars are becoming too tight? Mention that too.

The bottom line: It's OK to ask health questions online, but for a diagnosis, see your doctor. The AMA and physicians are trusted sources of evidence-based health and

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wellness information.

The web has millions of answers. Your doctor has yours.

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