Consumer Health: Understanding thyroid cancer risk
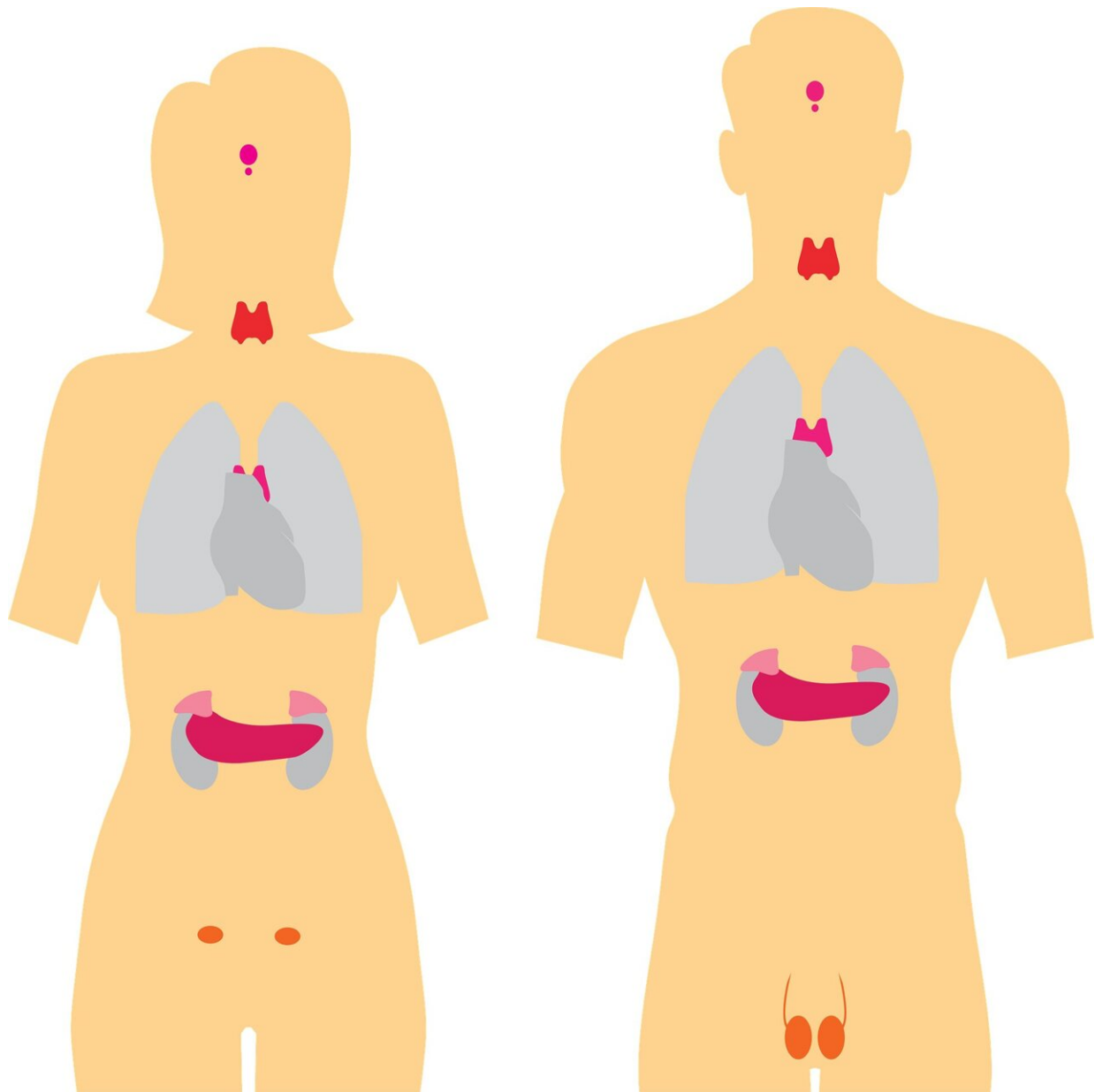
January 26 2022, by Laurel Kelly

January is Thyroid Awareness Month, which makes this a good time to learn about thyroid cancer risk factors.

Thyroid cancer occurs in the cells of the thyroid, which is a butterfly-shaped gland at the base of your neck. Your thyroid produces hormones that regulate your heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature and weight.

There may be no signs or symptoms early in the disease. As thyroid cancer grows, it may cause pain and swollen lymph nodes; difficulty swallowing; and changes to your voice, including increasing hoarseness.

Factors that may increase the risk of thyroid cancer include:

• Being female: Thyroid cancer occurs more often in women than men.

• Exposure to high levels of radiation: Radiation therapy treatments to the head and neck increase the risk of thyroid cancer.

• Certain inherited genetic syndromes: Genetic syndromes that increase the risk of thyroid cancer include familial medullary thyroid cancer, multiple endocrine neoplasia, Cowden syndrome and familial adenomatous polyposis.

Most thyroid cancers can be cured with treatment. Your treatment options will depend on the type and stage of your thyroid cancer, your overall health, and your preferences. Small thyroid cancers that have a low risk of spreading in the body might not need treatment right away. Instead, you may consider active surveillance with frequent monitoring

of the cancer.

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