

Thyroidectomy Instructions

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland that sits low in the front part of the neck and functions to regulate the body's metabolism. It is removed in cases of cancer, suspicion of cancer, when the gland is very large and compressing structures in the neck, for chronic infection, or for persistently increased function. The thyroid gland is near several important structures in the neck which are at risk from thyroid disease or during thyroid surgery. These structures include the parathyroid glands (regulate the body's calcium levels) and the laryngeal nerve (controls the vocal cords).

Postoperative Period

- ***You will spend the night in the hospital.*** During this time the wound is monitored, as are your calcium levels in the blood.
- ***Mild to moderate postoperative pain is normal.*** This is easily controlled with medication.
- ***A surgical drain in the wound is sometimes necessary*** to prevent accumulation of fluid under the wound.
- ***Sore throat and discomfort with swallowing*** are due to general anesthesia and the surgery itself, and are short term only.
- ***Voice hoarseness*** may be temporary or permanent, depending on the nature of your thyroid problem. Usually the voice sounds normal within 1-2 weeks of surgery, but if not, please notify your surgeon.
- ***Decreased blood calcium levels*** may manifest as numbness and tingling around the mouth & fingers, spontaneous twitching in the face or mouth, and muscle spasm and cramping. Please notify your surgeon or go to the Emergency Room if this condition occurs. Treatment typically involves oral calcium supplements.
- ***Bleeding*** is rare after thyroid surgery. If this occurs, extensive swelling of the neck can occur and may need to be drained. Notify your surgeon or go the Emergency Room immediately.

Activity

You will need to rest (off work or school) for 1 week after surgery. No vigorous activity should be performed for 2 weeks. Also, rapid head turning should be avoided for 1-2 weeks.

Diet

A bland diet is usually recommended for 24 hours after surgery, then a regular diet may be resumed.

Medication

You will be given a prescription pain medication. Please do not drive, operate machinery, or drink alcohol while taking this medication. You may also be given calcium supplements to prevent low calcium levels in the blood.

Follow up

We will see you in the office about 1 week after surgery to check your wound, remove any skin sutures, and to go over your pathology results. You may be instructed to follow-up with your primary care physician or an endocrinologist if long-term use of thyroid hormone replacement is necessary.