

Thyroid Surgery

Your thyroid is a small, butterfly-shaped gland beneath your Adam's apple. This gland helps to control your body's metabolism, or how your body works. It makes hormones that travel through the blood to other parts of your body. Thyroid hormones tell the body how fast to work and use energy.

When you are healthy, your thyroid works like an air conditioner, cycling on and off. When there is enough thyroid hormone in the blood, it turns off. When the body needs more hormones, it turns back on.

Sometimes the thyroid works too well and doesn't turn off when it should. This is called hyperthyroidism. Your doctor may suggest surgery to treat it. Other reasons for surgery are for treatment of thyroid cancer or to remove thyroid nodules.

Surgery

All or part of your thyroid will be removed. The wound is 1-3 inches long. The incision follows the fold of the skin on your neck. During the 1-3 hour surgery, you will be under general anesthesia. You will go home the same day or stay one night in the hospital.

How will I feel after surgery?

Your throat may be sore when you swallow. This is normal and can last 1-2 days. You may feel like you have a lump in your throat when you swallow. This will get better after a few days, but can last up to 6-8 weeks.

Your voice may be hoarse or you may feel that your voice gets tired. These changes can last for 1-2 weeks.

The back of your neck may be sore from the position of your head during surgery. Some patients feel a pulling in the neck muscles. This will get better in 3-4 weeks. It may feel better to use 1-2 pillows in bed. Using a heating pad on the back of your neck might also help.

The parathyroid glands are four small glands near the thyroid. They control blood calcium. If your whole thyroid is removed, these four glands may not work right away. Your blood calcium may be low. If you have numbness and tingling in your face, lips, fingertips, or toes, chew 4 - Tums[®] 500 mg each (2000 mg of calcium carbonate). The numbness and tingling should go away in 30 minutes. If numbness and tingling do not go away after 30 minutes, chew more Tums[®] 2000mg. If the symptoms do not go away 30 minutes after the second dose of Tums[®], please call us and take a third dose of Tums 2000mg.

Calcium and prescription pain pills can be constipating. To prevent this problem, you may want to take a stool softener each day that you use prescription pain pills and until you have your first bowel movement after your surgery. You may want to start with Peri-Colace[®]. Take Peri-Colace[®] (docusate sodium 50 mg; sennosides 8.6 mg) two tablets, one to two times a day as needed for constipation. Follow the package directions.

If your thyroid was removed due to cancer, more treatment may be needed.

How do I care for my wound?

Your wound is closed with glue. If you have Steri-strips (pieces of tape) over the incision, leave the tape on until your next doctor visit. Curled tape edges may be

trimmed with small scissors. Keep the wound clean and dry. The glue is waterproof. It is okay to shower.

Look at your wound daily, check for signs of an infection.

- Spreading redness or swelling
- Foul-smelling drainage or pus
- A fever (more than 101° F by mouth)

What about pain?

Expect that your wound will be tender. You will have prescription pain pills to use at home. You may take Tylenol® instead of the prescription pain pills. Once you are home you can also take ibuprofen or naproxen (Aleve®). Use ice at the incision sites, 20 minutes on 20 minutes off.

When can I eat?

You can eat your normal diet when you get home. If your throat is still sore, try cold, soft foods.

When can I take a bath?

You can shower anytime. No swimming or soaking in water for 14 days.

When can I drive?

You can drive when you are not taking prescription pain medicine and when you can easily turn your head from side to side.

When can I exercise?

Light exercise is fine. Avoid strenuous exercise for the first week. Avoid straining or extreme bending of your neck. Do not lift more than 20 pounds the first week.

When can I return to work?

You can return to work when you feel up to it. Most people return to work in one week. If your job requires heavy lifting, you may require 2 weeks off. Please discuss this with your surgeon.

When to Call

- This is rare, but if you have trouble breathing, a sudden swelling in your throat, or cannot swallow, **Call 911**.
- If you have numbness or tingling in your fingertips, face, lips, or toes that does not go away after two extra doses of Tums®.
- Pain that does not get better with prescription pain pills.
- Signs of infection
- Fever greater than 101°
- Any other symptoms that concern you.

Who to Call

Endocrine Surgery Clinic
608-242-2888 (This is a 24-hour number)

Call toll free at: **1-800-323-8942**. Ask for the doctor on call for endocrine surgery.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2020. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Authority. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4749