

Neck Dissection

A neck dissection is the removal of lymph nodes and nearby tissue from the neck. It may be done at the same time as thyroid surgery or after thyroid surgery if there is concern about cancer in the lymph nodes.

Surgery

Your surgeon will discuss how many lymph nodes will be removed. The wound is 2-4 inches long. During the 2-4-hour surgery, you will be under general anesthesia. You may go home the same day or stay one night in the hospital.

After Surgery

Your throat may be sore when you swallow. This is normal. This can last 1-2 days. The front or back of your neck may be sore. For the first 24-48 hours, keep your head raised at least 30 degrees. Do not lie flat in bed. The more upright you are the less swelling you will have. Some patients feel a pulling in the neck muscles. This will get better in 3-4 weeks.

You may feel like you have a lump in your throat when you swallow. This will get better but can last up to 6-8 weeks after surgery. You may have decreased feeling in the jaw or neck. Your voice may be hoarse, or you may feel that your voice gets tired.

The parathyroid glands are small glands near the thyroid. They control blood calcium. These glands may not work right away after surgery. This can make your blood calcium low. Your levels will be checked right after surgery to see if you are at risk for low calcium. Low calcium can cause numbness and tingling in your face, lips, fingertips, or toes. If this occurs, you should chew Tums® 2000 mg. The numbness and tingling should go away in 30 minutes. If it does not go

away in 30 minutes, chew a second dose of Tums® 2000 mg. If the symptoms still do not go away after 30 minutes, take a third dose of Tums® 2000 mg and call us.

Pain

The front and back of your neck will be sore after surgery. This will last for a few hours to a few days. You can use an ice pack to the incision area, this will help reduce both pain and swelling. A heating pad on the back of your neck might help with pain. You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) 1000mg every 4-6 hours as needed for pain. Do not take more than 4000 mg per day. The day after surgery, you may take ibuprofen 400 mg every 4-6 hours as needed for pain. If you are allergic or have other medical conditions that do not allow you to take either of these your surgeon will provide you with something else.

You may be given a prescription for pain pills to take at home for the first 24-48 hours after the surgery.

Calcium and prescription pain pills can be constipating. You may want to take a stool softener each day that you use them until you have your first bowel movement. You may want to start with **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. Miralax is also good to help with constipation.

Wound Care

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

The glue is waterproof. It is okay to shower.

If you have a drain, we will teach you how to care for it at home.

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).

When can I eat?

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

Activities

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

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

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

You can return to work when you feel up to it. Most people return to work in one week.

If your job requires regular 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**.
- Swelling of your neck that is getting worse.
- Increased amount of fluid in the drain (if you have a drain)
- 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 more than 101°F
- Any other symptoms

Who to Call

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

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

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 © 4/2023 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7476