

Home Care After Thyroidectomy

This handout explains how to take care of yourself at home after a thyroidectomy.

What to Expect

You will have an incision at the base of your neck, covered with a gauze dressing. You may have a drainage tube. The drainage may look blood-tinged or yellow colored. If you have a drainage tube, it's often removed the next day. You may notice drainage from the drain site for the next day or two.

For a short time, your voice may be weak or hoarse. You may feel like you have a lump in your throat. There may be some pain at your incision or when you swallow. If needed, take your pain medicine 30 minutes before eating to help reduce the pain.

Incision Care

You may shower and wash around the incision site with soap and water 24 hours after surgery or 24 hours after the drainage tube is removed. Do **not** soak your neck under water until the incision is fully healed.

If you have stitches that need to be removed, this will be done at your first follow-up clinic visit.

If you have white surgical strips, leave them in place until you come back for your first follow-up clinic visit.

Activity

You should take about 1 week off work.

Avoid strenuous exercise such as jogging, aerobics, swimming, or lifting over 10-20 pounds for 1 week.

Keep your head raised while sleeping by using 2-3 pillows for 1 week.

Parathyroid Glands

These four delicate glands are attached to the thyroid. The parathyroid glands control calcium levels. When these glands don't work, calcium levels are lowered.

Sometimes, the parathyroid glands will not work because of the surgery. You may need calcium and vitamin D supplements after surgery. Sometimes, these are required long term after surgery.

Medicine

If you have had your entire thyroid gland removed, you will need to be on thyroid medicine for the rest of your life. Your surgeon will prescribe your first dose. Future prescriptions will come from your primary care doctor or thyroid specialist.

When to Call

Call your doctor if you notice:

- Coughing with every swallow
- Signs and symptoms of infection:
 - Redness
 - Fever over 100.5° F by mouth for 24 hours
 - Swelling, pain at the site
 - Pus-like drainage
- Signs and symptoms of low blood calcium:
 - Numbness or tingling around your lips or in your fingertips or toes
 - Facial twitching or weakness

If you have trouble breathing, **go to the nearest emergency room or call 911.**

Who to Call

Call if you have any questions or problems once you are home.

University Hospital

ENT Clinic

Monday – Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm

(608) 263-6190 or 1-800-323-8942

1 S Park St Medical Center

ENT Clinic

Monday – Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm

(608) 287-2500

After hours, nights and weekends, this will give you the paging operator. Ask for the ENT doctor on call. Give your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

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 © 3/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5735