

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.

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. Use ice at the incision sites, 20 minutes on 20 minutes off to reduce pain and swelling.

Medicines

Expect that your wound will be tender. You may be given prescription pain pills to take at home. You can also take Tylenol® instead of the prescription pain pills. Do not take more than 4000mg per day. You can also take ibuprofen or naproxen (Aleve®) as needed for pain.

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. Low calcium can cause numbness and tingling in your face, lips, fingertips, or toes. If this occurs, you should chew Calcium Carbonate (Tums®) 2000 mg. Chewable calcium works best as it is absorbed quicker than calcium in a pill form. 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.

You may also be prescribed Tums® after your surgery. You will take this at scheduled times every day until your follow up appointment.

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.

Wound Care

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)

Diet

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 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. 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.

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**
- Swelling of your neck that is getting worse
- 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

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 © 5/2023. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Authority. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4749