



# After Thyroid Surgery

July 1

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- Hemithyroidectomy
- Total Thyroidectomy
- Parathyroidectomy

# Thyroid Gland and Parathyroid Gland Surgery

## What does this gland do?

The thyroid gland lies just below your larynx (voice box) at the base of your throat. This butterfly-shaped gland has two lobes. The lobes lie on both sides of the trachea (windpipe).

The thyroid gland causes problems if it is too active or not active enough. The thyroid gland makes a hormone that is very important in controlling the activity of many cells in the body.

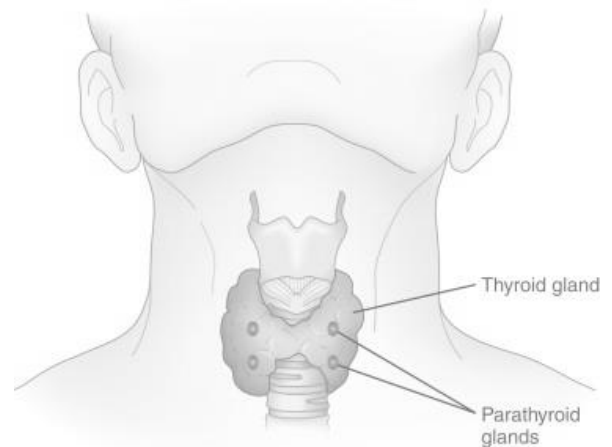
In the region of each lobe of the thyroid gland is a small pair of parathyroid glands. They help balance the body's calcium levels which is important for muscle tone and nerve impulses.

## What is my operation called?

Hemithyroidectomy – Removal of half of the thyroid gland.

Total Thyroidectomy – Removal of the entire gland.

Parathyroidectomy – Removal of some or all of the parathyroid glands.



## What things do I need to consider after my surgery?

### Controlling discomfort

- You can expect the usual effects of having a general anesthetic. This may be nausea, sore throat, and feeling like you are in a dream. There are medicines to help you with some of these problems.
- Some of the muscles in your neck may be sore. When you are getting up, place your hands together behind your neck for support. This will protect the neck muscles from strain.
- You should take extra strength acetaminophen (Tylenol) for pain. Your surgeon may prescribe a stronger pain medication.

## Meals

- Eating healthy food will help your incision to heal.
- Your throat may be sore for a few days from the breathing tube during surgery. This is normal. You may want to eat foods that are easier to swallow while your throat is sore.
- Follow any special diet that you have been given by your dietitian.

## Activity

- You will be admitted for one night after surgery for observation, and discharged the following morning. Please make arrangements to have a responsible adult drive you home.
- You can get up and out of bed shortly after your surgery.
- Gentle deep breathing and coughing help keep your lungs free of infection.
- Walk as much as you can.
- Add to your activity every day. For example, add 5 minutes of walking every day.
- Go back to driving when you can turn your head with ease (about 3 weeks).
- Do not lift more than 5 pounds for 3 weeks. This includes children.
- Go back to sexual activity when you feel well enough (not for the first week).

## When should I call my surgeon?

Call your surgeon's office **immediately** if you have:

- a wheeze
- muscle cramps or spasms
- tingling in the fingers or around the mouth (this suggests that your calcium is dangerously low!)
- fever
- drainage from the incision
- an increase in pain if the pain had been decreasing

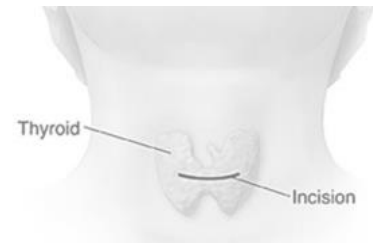
If you cannot reach your surgeon, present to an outpatient or emergency department.

## Will I need any blood samples taken after my surgery?

Your doctor may want your blood checked for calcium levels after surgery. This may need to be repeated. An injection of calcium or calcium pulls may be given if the calcium level is too low.

## How do I take care of my incision?

You will have a horizontal incision on the front of your neck. You may have a small drain (tube) in your incision. This drain will remove any blood or fluid that may collect. It will be removed a day or two after surgery.



Your incision may have been closed with a stitch that absorbs. These do not need to be removed. If your stitches are not absorbable they need to be removed by your surgeon at your follow-up appointment. You may also have tapes over the skin called Steri-strips. After your surgery, do not get this area wet for 48 hours. Three (3) days after your surgery you may get the area wet when showering or bathing. Simply pat the incision dry, do not rub.

### If you have Steri-strips:

- You will notice that the edges of the Steri-strips start to curl up after about 5-7 days.
- After 7 days you can take them off by grasping the edge and removing it like a Band-aid.
- Once removed, wash the area twice a day with peroxide. After each wash, apply Polysporin ointment to the wound until your follow-up visit with your surgeon (7 days).
- After 7 days you then switch to warm water and soap and apply Vaseline or V-STAT Advanced Scar Gel (available for purchase at Dr. Taylor and Dr. Kujath's office).

Swelling around the incision is normal. This can go on for several weeks after surgery. However, most swelling should settle down between 1-2 weeks after the surgery. The incisions tend to look their worst between 2-6 weeks after the surgery. This swelling and redness of the incision will settle down over the next few weeks. It will take 3-6 months for the incision to completely heal. You should keep the incision out of direct sunlight for 1 year. Do this by covering the area with clothing or sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or greater.

### What medicines will I need after my surgery?

If you had half (1/2) of your thyroid gland removed then you may be sent home on some pain pills. It is unlikely that you will need thyroid replacement medicine. However, this should be checked by your doctor about 6 weeks after the surgery. No other medicines are usually needed.

If you had the entire thyroid gland removed, then you will be sent home on a thyroid replacement medicine. You will get a dose that is right for your weight. This is usually a pill called Synthroid. Your family doctor will check your thyroid function about 6 weeks after surgery to decide if you are on the right amount of this medicine.

## **Will I need to take calcium after surgery?**

If you had the entire thyroid gland removed and/or the parathyroid glands removed, you may have to take calcium pills. You may also need a Vitamin D medicine called Rocalcitrol. If you need this medicine, we will make sure that you are on the right dose for you, before leaving the hospital. You may need to have your calcium levels checked every day after surgery. This is to make sure that you are getting the right amount of this medicine. Most cases of low calcium are temporary. Usually the calcium levels will return to normal within a few weeks or a few months after the surgery. It is important to take the prescribed dose of calcium and Rocalcitrol. Calcium levels can drop quickly if the pills are not taken regularly. If you experience symptoms of low calcium while you are at home, you should present to your nearest emergency department. Ask them to check your ionized calcium level (\*BEFORE giving you any calcium medicine). Symptoms of low calcium include tingling or numbness in the hands or feet, numbness around the mouth area, or muscle spasm. In untreated, this can lead to problems with your heart rhythm. The attending physician should call the Ear, Nose and Throat surgeon on-call.

## **Will I need to see the doctor again?**

- Keep your follow-up appointment with your surgeon.
- Regular visits to your doctor to check the balance of your hormones are important. Blood tests will be needed.

## **The Biopsy**

A doctor with special training will study a sample of the tissue taken during surgery under a microscope in the laboratory. It may take 3-4 weeks after surgery before your report is ready. The waiting period is not easy, but your doctor will share the report with you as soon as possible. If you require further treatment, it will be discussed with your surgeon.

## **If you have any problems or questions call (902) 678-4233.**

If your doctor is not available, go to an Emergency Department.