

Parathyroid Surgery Postoperative Care Head and Neck Surgical Oncology

Home Care

Hand Hygiene

When you are discharged home after surgery it is vitally important to utilize good hand hygiene when caring for your incisions. This will help prevent infection.

The Parathyroid Glands

There are four parathyroid glands located on the back of and lower edge of the thyroid gland. These glands secrete a hormone called parathyroid hormone (PTH) that regulates calcium levels in the body. Abnormal parathyroid glands may produce too much parathyroid hormone which can lead to high calcium levels in your blood. This is called hypercalcemia. High calcium levels can increase your risk of kidney stones, weak bones (osteoporosis), GI problems, and fatigue. Most abnormal parathyroid glands are benign (noncancerous) tumors called adenomas. Parathyroid cancers are extremely rare.

As part of your surgery, you may require the removal of one or more of your parathyroid glands. The parathyroid glands are around several important structures that often need to be moved during surgery. Most importantly, a pair of nerves that move your vocal cords (recurrent laryngeal nerves) are next to your parathyroid glands. As a result, you may notice changes in voice or hoarseness that are usually temporary after surgery.

What to expect after surgery?

- A parathyroidectomy is frequently an outpatient procedure and you will most likely be discharged after you recover from your surgery. Sometimes patients are observed overnight especially if surgery is more extensive. Your surgeon will discuss with you either before or after your surgery.
- After surgery your body will need time to heal
 - Expect about a week or two before you can return to normal activities
 - Please restart your normal day to day activities slowly
- You may use ice on your incision post-surgery to help with pain and swelling
- Possible side effects from surgery include:
 - Soreness in your throat and neck
 - Voice changes or hoarseness
 - Mild difficulties swallowing
 - Numbness around your incision line. This is normal and will most likely improve with time.

- During the time period immediately after surgery, your body will be adjusting to changes in the calcium in your blood. You may experience temporary issues with lower blood calcium levels, which can cause numbness/tingling if your fingers, toes, and lips. You could also notice muscle spasms. This sometimes requires calcium and Vitamin D supplementation, but this is rare.

Incision care

After your surgery, your neck may have sutures or surgical glue (e.g. Dermabond) closing the incision. You will need to follow up with your surgeon a few weeks after surgery for a post-operative visit to check on your healing as well as obtain blood work.

- You may shower when you are discharged home. Depending on what type of closure you have will determine when you can get water on your incision.
- For incision closures with external sutures, you will have wound care instructions on how to clean and apply ointment to the incision. You will also be instructed on when you can get shower water on the incision, typically 3 days following surgery.
- For incision closures with surgical glue, you do not directly clean or apply any ointments.
- You may allow shower water to run over the glue the day following surgery.
- Once you are allowed to get water on your incision site, do not let the shower hit the incision directly. After showering, you should pat dry the area and continue with the wound care instructions given after surgery.
- Be careful not to rub or scrub the incision site. The incision site does not require a dressing.
- If your incision site is draining fluid a dressing may be used. If a dressing is used, please change dressing at least once daily or more depending on your surgeon's recommendations.

Medication

You received multiple medications prior to surgery to minimize the pain from the procedure. Postoperatively, acetaminophen and ibuprofen should be sufficient for pain control after the procedure. If your pain medications are not effective in treating your pain please contact the Head and Neck clinic team.

Special Instructions

Some issues may come up that are normal for your type of surgery.

Call your doctor immediately if you're having any of the following symptoms:

1. Separation of the skin at the incision site
2. Worsening redness around the incision
3. Temperature of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher
4. Tenderness, swelling, pus, warmth, redness, or pressure around the incision site
5. Difficulty swallowing

6. Increasing neck swelling
7. Trouble breathing
8. Call 911 or your local hospital emergency center if your breathing becomes labored or you have rapid swelling in your neck
9. Tingling or numbness in your fingertips or around the mouth in the first 72 hours after surgery. This may be a sign your body has a low calcium level.
10. You experience numbness or tingling around the lips and finger tips or
11. Notice muscle cramping (as these could be symptoms of low calcium levels). If this occurs, your surgeon will likely have you take some Tums at home. It is important that you have Tums available at your home following surgery. Your parathyroid hormone levels and calcium will be checked at your post-operative visit.

Follow-up Care

You will have a post-operative visit with your surgeon a few weeks after surgery for an incision check and lab studies. You will be given a follow up date and time before as part of your surgery scheduling appointment. Call Head and Neck Surgery clinic prior to post-operative visit to arrange for any lab work that is needed for your clinic visit.

Emergency Center

In case of any emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency center. *For non-emergencies during business hours, call our triage line at 904-202-7300 option 3.*

Adapted from The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center 2015 and National institute of Diabetes and digestive and kidney diseases.

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