

## Thyroid 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 Thyroid Gland

The thyroid gland is located in your neck. It makes a hormone that the body uses to regulate your metabolism. In general, when the thyroid gland makes too much of this hormone, the body's metabolism speeds up; and if it makes too little of the hormone, the body's metabolism slows down. Removal of part (lobectomy) or all of the thyroid gland (total thyroidectomy) may be done for several different reasons. A surgeon may recommend removal of your thyroid gland if your gland produces too much thyroid hormone, if the gland is enlarged and compressing surrounding structures, if it has concerning nodules, or if it has cancer in it. In the case of thyroid cancer, your surgeon may also recommend removal of the lymph nodes adjacent to your thyroid gland as well. Your surgeon will discuss the specifics of your case with you pre-operatively.

The thyroid gland is also next to several important structures that often need to be manipulated during surgery. It lies on top of a pair of nerves that move your vocal cords (superior and recurrent laryngeal nerves). As a result, you may notice changes in voice or hoarseness that are usually temporary after surgery. There are also four small glands (parathyroid glands) around the thyroid that help your body regulate calcium levels. These glands may get stunned with manipulation, which can result in low calcium levels that require calcium and Vitamin D supplements.

#### What to expect after surgery?

- A thyroidectomy is usually 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, or if you are at risk for having low calcium levels after surgery. 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:
  - You may experience some temporary changes to your voice that will improve with time
    - This is due to the manipulation of the laryngeal nerves when your surgical team removes your thyroid
  - You may experience some temporary difficulty swallowing
  - You may experience temporary issues with your low blood calcium levels
    - You have four parathyroid glands that regulate the balance of calcium in the body
    - During surgery these glands may be manipulated so that the thyroid gland can be removed
    - This type of manipulation of the glands may result in temporary dysfunction of your calcium levels
      - This is monitored and treated with medications post-surgery

## Incision care

After surgery, your neck may have Dermabond, dissolvable and/or non-dissolvable sutures or staples. You will need to follow up with your surgeon about 1- 2 weeks after surgery for an incision check and to have the non-dissolvable and/or staples removed in clinic. You may shower when you are discharged home. **Do not** let shower hit incision directly. Wash the incision daily with soap and water. Pat dry. **Do not** use any ointment or cream over the incision except for those specified by your surgical team. Antibiotic ointment (e.g. Bacitracin) will be used on the incision if it is closed with sutures or staples until the first post-operative appointment with your surgeon. The dressing of the incision site will be discussed with you before you are discharged by a member of the Head and Neck team.

## Medication

Tylenol 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.

Our goal is for you to have good pain control after your surgery and during recovery.

Your surgeon may also recommend you take calcium and/or vitamin D supplements (e.g. Tums and/or Rocaltrol) until your calcium levels return back to normal. Please call

your surgeon if you experience numbness or tingling around the lips, finger tips or muscle cramping. If all or a large portion of your thyroid gland is removed, you will need thyroid hormone replacement therapy. Your surgeon will provide you with a prescription and instructions on how to take your medication before you are discharged home. It is recommended that you take thyroid replacement medication on an empty stomach, and at least 30 minutes prior to food. Your thyroid hormone levels will be checked 6-12 weeks after surgery. Checking your levels will help your doctor adjust your dose as needed.

## Special Instructions

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

- You may experience numbness over the incision itself or over areas near the incision. This is normal and will most likely improve with time.
- Manipulation of your laryngeal nerves is often required for surgery and may result in them getting stunned during surgery. You may experience voice changes such as hoarseness after surgery and this should improve with time.
- Manipulation of your parathyroid glands is often required for surgery and may result in the glands not functioning properly. This is often temporary after surgery and should improve with time.
  1. Your surgeon will monitor your blood calcium levels and determine whether you need supplementation.
- Nutrition is important for wound healing after surgery so make sure to get adequate amounts of calories and protein in your diet
  1. After surgery you may have some minor difficulties swallowing due to the inflammation and swelling
  2. You may advance diet as tolerated
- You may have a sore throat. This can be caused by the breathing tube used during surgery or the incision on your neck. This is normal and will improve with time.
- The stitches in your neck may cause you to feel a sticking sensation as you swallow. This feeling is normal and will improve with time.
- 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. This may be a sign your body has a low calcium level.

## Follow-up Care

You will have a post-operative visit with your surgeon about 1-2 weeks after surgery for an incision check. You will be given a follow up date and time before you are discharged from the hospital. Call Head and Neck clinic prior to post-operative visit to make sure that you are not responsible for having any lab work prior to 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.*