

THYROIDECTOMY

You have been scheduled to have a thyroidectomy - the removal of a portion or possibly all of your thyroid gland.

You will be admitted to the hospital through Same Day Surgery. The staff there will prepare you for your surgery and send you to the operating room holding area. There, an IV needle will be inserted into your arm.

After you have entered the operating room, the anesthesiologist will put you to sleep using general anesthesia. Your surgery will last two to four hours. When you awaken, you will go to the recovery room for two hours. Then, you'll be transferred to a hospital room. If all of your thyroid was removed, you may be sent to the Surgical Surveillance Unit. If only a portion was removed, you may be admitted to a surgical unit. Your hospital stay will last one to two days.

All the tissue removed during your surgery will be sent to the pathologist for evaluation. Sometimes, a problem will be discovered and you will need additional surgery. If you have a tumor, you should know that both benign and malignant tumors may return, so you will need to be watched carefully.

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

Potential complications from surgery include:

- Injury to one of the nerves that control speech, which may cause your voice to change. This change can be temporary or permanent.
- Hypocalcemia (Low levels of calcium in the blood), which require you to take calcium and vitamin D on an ongoing basis.
- Complications from the anesthesia.
- Bleeding.
- Obstruction of your airway.

AFTER SURGERY

After your surgery you can expect the following:

- **Discomfort at the incision.** You may feel some mild pain or discomfort at your incision (the opening made during surgery). Pain medication will be prescribed which you can take as needed. Prop your head up while lying in bed and support your neck with both hands when you sit up or turn.

- **Pressure Dressing.** You will have a tight bandage around your neck for 24 hours. If you are sent home with the bandage, you may remove it the second day after surgery. If you have a drain, it will be removed before you go home.
- **Eating.** You will be given fluids through your IV until you can swallow liquids. Then you can return to regular food. You may feel like you have a “lump in your throat” when you swallow.
- **Changes in your calcium level.** Your calcium level may drop temporarily or permanently after your surgery. A symptom of low calcium is severe tingling in your hands. Your calcium levels will be monitored through regular blood tests. You may be given calcium through pills or through your IV.
- **Incision care.** When your bandage is removed, you will notice thin strips of tape, called steri-strips, across the incision. It is important to keep your incision clean and dry. You may leave the incision open to air. The steri-strips and stitches will be removed at the same time.
- Be sure to come to your follow-up appointment one week after surgery so that your stitches can be removed. Your doctor may have the report from pathology at that time, so you can discuss whether further treatment is needed.
- **Activity restrictions.** Do not lift anything heavy for two weeks. Do not drive for two weeks. Rest often; you will need more rest than normal.
- **Recovery time.** You will feel a tightness as well as a “lump in your throat” for three to six months after your surgery. The skin of your neck will also be numb for this length of time. This is all normal after surgery.
- **Thyroid Replacement Therapy.** You may need to be given thyroid medication to replace the hormone your thyroid used to produce. This medicine uses a natural hormone that should produce no side effects (In rare cases, some people develop an allergy). In most cases, you will take this medication for the rest of your life.

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

Call your doctor if you have:

- A fever over 100 degrees.
- Muscle twitching, weakness or stiffness.
- Swelling in your neck.
- Unusual pain that does not go away when you take your pain medication.

If you have trouble breathing or are bleeding heavily, go to the Emergency Department at the nearest hospital.

If you have any questions or problems, please call (773) 296-7040 or the 24 hour answering service at (312) 236-3642.