

Parotidectomy

What is the parotid gland?

The parotid gland is a salivary gland that lies immediately in front of the ear. Saliva drains from it through a tube that opens on the inside of the cheek next to the upper back teeth. The parotid gland is most commonly operated on to remove a lump.

What does the operation involve?

The parotid gland is removed under general anesthesia, so you are put to sleep completely. The operation involves making a cut immediately in front of the ear. This cut is extended either downwards into the neck or behind the ear. Once the gland has been removed the incision is held together again with stitches. At the end of the operation a small tube is also placed through the skin into the underlying wound to drain any blood which may collect. This is usually removed in the day or two following surgery.

What can I expect after surgery?

You usually need a night or two in the hospital following the surgery. It is unlikely to be very sore but regular painkillers will be arranged for you. There is relatively little swelling following parotid gland removal. Since part of the gland is taken away it can leave a dent under the skin.

How do I care for myself after surgery?

It is important to keep the wound dry for the first 4 days following surgery. All cuts made through the skin leave a scar but the majority of these fade with time and are difficult to see when they are fully healed. It may take several months for your scar to fade but eventually it should blend into the natural folds and contours of your face.

Will I have any activity restrictions?

It is usually advisable to take a week off from work to recover from the surgery. During this time you should avoid heavy lifting and strenuous activity.

Are there diet restrictions after surgery?

There are generally no diet restrictions after this surgery.

How do I manage pain after surgery?

You should expect that there may be some discomfort in the process. Pain management is individualized for you. Generally a combination of oral medications are used to control pain.

What follow-up care will I receive?

Your first return appointment will be one to two weeks after your surgery.

What are the possible complications?

Bleeding from the wound is unlikely to be a problem. If it occurs it usually does so within the first 12 hours of surgery which is why you need to stay in hospital overnight.

Infection is uncommon but if your surgeon thinks it may happen to you a short course of antibiotics will be prescribed.

Sometimes saliva leaks out of the wound (salivary fistula). This problem usually settles down on its own but can take several weeks to get better.

Nerve Damage -The facial nerve runs directly through the center of the parotid gland. It is the nerve that makes the muscles of the face work. Damage to some or all of that nerve can result in weakness of the muscles on one side of your face. Most nerve damage occurs as a result of bruising since the facial nerve is held out of the way and protected during surgery. If nerve damage occurs it is usually temporary although it can take several months to recover fully. An exception to the rule is parotid surgery for cancer in which removal of this nerve may be required resulting in permanent paralysis of one side of the face. The nerve that supplies feeling to your ear lobe (greater auricular nerve) usually requires removal to gain access to the parotid gland and as a result you may end up with a numb or tingling feeling in your ear lobe.

Long Term Effects

The removal of one parotid gland will not have an impact on the amount of saliva that you produce. There are many other salivary glands left in and around the mouth that will still keep it moist. Some patients notice that the skin in and around the ear sweats excessively after the parotid gland has been removed (gustatory sweating, Frey's syndrome). The sweating is particularly noticeable around mealtime when the skin can also turn red and feel warm. If this occurs it can usually be alleviated with simple treatments that do not require further surgery.

When should I call my doctor?

If you have increased redness, swelling or bruising.

If you have persistent bleeding.

If you have increased pain or tenderness in your upper or lower jaw.

If you have any side effects to medications; such as, rash, nausea, headache, vomiting, increased irritability, or constipation.



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If you have persistent fevers.