

Thyroidectomy

What is the thyroid gland?

The Thyroid gland is a butterfly shaped gland in your neck. It uses iodine from your diet to produce the hormone thyroxine. This hormone controls your body's metabolism. Part or all of the thyroid gland is often removed due to size, a lump in the gland, hyperthyroidism or cancer of the thyroid gland.

What does the operation involve?

The Thyroid gland is removed under general anesthesia, so you are put to sleep completely. The operation involves making a cut in the front of your lower neck. 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. You may experience some swelling around the wound. The skin around the wound may feel numb to touch.

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 or two 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. You might find that swallowing feels tight post-operatively. This should settle down with time.

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 a possibility post operatively. If you notice a sudden increase in swelling to the neck it is important to be reviewed.

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

Hoarse voice – Sometimes surgery to the thyroid gland can affect the nerves that supply the voice box. This can make your voice hoarse or weak. This is usually temporary, but can be permanent in a small number of cases

Mood changes are possible with changes in thyroid hormone levels. If you undergo a total thyroidectomy, you will be commenced on thyroxine post-operatively. Post total thyroidectomy you will need your thyroid hormone levels check 1 month post operatively to ensure you are receiving the correct dosage of thyroxine.

Low calcium levels may occur post-operatively after total thyroidectomy(hypocalcaemia). This is due to the parathyroid glands being affected by the surgery. Symptoms may include headache, tingling in your hands, feet and lips or muscle cramps. Blood tests will be performed to check calcium levels post-operatively and you may be prescribed calcium and/or vitamin D supplements. This can be a permanent problem in a small number of cases.

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 neck.

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

If you have persistent fevers.