



Thyroplasty Surgery

After your operation

This handout explains what to expect after thyroplasty, a surgery to change the position or length of your vocal cords. This surgery is done to help relieve ongoing hoarseness and swallowing problems.

Thyroplasty surgery is done when either one or both of your vocal cords do not work properly. Symptoms may include a hoarse voice or swallowing problems.

During surgery, your doctor will place an implant through a small incision made in your neck. This implant will help move the vocal cord that does not work well closer to the other one that does work. This will improve your voice and, in many cases, your ability to swallow. Some patients need an implant on both their right and left vocal cord.

Implants can be made out of Gor-Tex or Silastic. Both of these are man-made materials used in medical procedures.

What to Expect When You Go Home

Voice Rest

Your doctor will recommend at least 2 days of “voice rest” after surgery. This means you must use your voice as little as possible.

Incision Care

You will have an incision right below your Adam’s apple. The incision will be closed with stitches. These stitches will be taken out at your follow-up visit 7 to 10 days after your surgery.

You will receive oral antibiotics to help prevent infection. Make sure that you take all of this medicine as prescribed.

It is important to keep your incision clean after surgery. At home, clean your incision with a clean, damp cloth and mild soap. You will need to apply antibiotic ointment to your incision several times a day. You may shower 2 days after you go home.

Check your incision every day for signs of infection. Call the clinic if you have:

- Any changes in your breathing
- Increased redness or swelling around your incision
- A fever higher than 101° F (38.3°C)
- Foul-smelling drainage or pus from your incision

Pain

Most people have a little pain in and around the incision. Your doctor will give you a prescription for pain medicine. Most people take this medicine for a few days to 1 week after surgery.

Do **not** drive if you are taking narcotic pain medicine. It is not safe. The medicine can make you sleepy and delay your reaction time.

Activity

- Do **not** lift anything heavier than 10 pounds for 1 week after surgery. Even after several weeks, avoid heavy lifting or straining.
- Do **not** drive until you:
 - Are no longer taking narcotic pain medicines
 - Can easily turn your head
- Most other activities are OK if they do not tire you out too much. It is important to do some activity as soon as possible, such as taking short walks every day.
- Most people feel tired for 1 or 2 days after surgery, but your energy level should return to normal within a few days.

Possible Complications

- Your voice may become a little worse right after surgery because of swelling in your throat. To lessen this swelling, your doctor may prescribe steroids for you to take for a short time. Your voice should start to improve in the first few weeks after surgery.
- You may have some mild breathing problems. This is from your airway being narrowed when your vocal cords were moved closer together during surgery. Most people do not have any problems breathing, but if you do, it should get better within about 2 weeks.

If you have **serious** breathing problems, call the clinic or go to the emergency department.

Returning to Work

Depending on what type of work you do, it will be at least 2 or 3 days to a week before you return to work. If you use your voice a lot at work, you may need to take more time off. There may also be some limits on how much you can lift for a few weeks.

If you have questions about how long to take off work, please ask your doctor.

Stopping Smoking

If you smoke, it is **very important** that you quit. You will heal much faster if you are not smoking. Your chances of a poor outcome and your risk of other complications are much higher if you smoke.

There are many resources to help you quit smoking. Please ask your doctor or nurse for more information.

Follow-up Visits

- You will return to the clinic 7 to 10 days after surgery to have your stitches removed.
- You will return to the clinic for a follow-up visit 6 to 12 weeks after surgery.
- Any other appointments will depend on how well you are healing.

Speech Therapy

Most patients will need to work with a speech language pathologist before or after surgery. The pathologist will help you improve your voice and keep other problems from occurring.

When to Call the Clinic

Call the clinic if you have:

- Problems breathing or swallowing
- More pain than usual
- A fever that stays higher than 101°F (38.3°C) for 4 hours
- Bleeding or other drainage from your incision

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. Clinic staff are also available to help.

UWMC
**Otolaryngology –
Head and Neck
Surgery Center**
206-598-4022
3rd floor, UWMC
Box 356161
1959 N.E. Pacific St.
Seattle, WA 98195

HMC
**Otolaryngology
Specialty Clinics at
Ninth and Jefferson**
206-744-3770
908 Jefferson St.
Box 359803
Seattle, WA 98104

Contact Information

University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) Patients

- For appointments, call Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Center at 206-598-4022.
- If you are already a patient and have questions about your treatment plan:
 - Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Nurse Voice Mail Line at 206-598-4437.
 - After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206-598-6190 and ask for the Otolaryngology resident on call to be paged.

Harborview Medical Center (HMC) Patients

- For appointments and questions about your treatment:
 - Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., call 206-744-3770.
- After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206-744-3000 and ask for the Otolaryngology resident on call to be paged.

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