

# Thyroid and Parathyroid Surgery

## *How to prepare and what to expect*

*This handout is for patients at University of Washington Medical Center who are having thyroid and parathyroid surgery.*

### What are thyroid and parathyroid surgery?

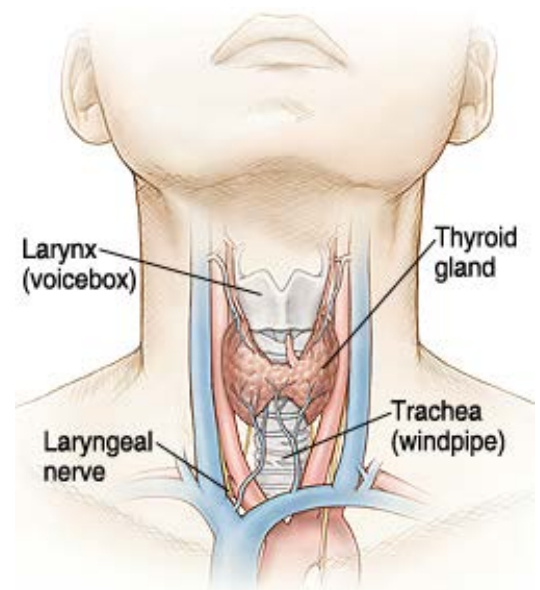
The *thyroid* is a gland in the neck that produces hormones. These hormones help the body use energy. Thyroid surgery involves removing part or all of the thyroid.

There are 4 small *parathyroid* glands on the back side of the thyroid. These glands also produce hormones. Parathyroid hormone helps the body control how much calcium is in the blood. Parathyroid surgery involves removing 1 or more of the parathyroid glands.

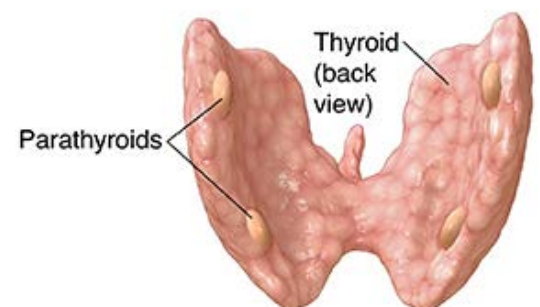
### Why do I need this surgery?

Your healthcare provider may have advised this surgery if you have one of these conditions:

- Thyroid cancer
- *Hyperthyroidism* – an illness where the thyroid gland produces too many hormones)
- *Graves' disease* – an autoimmune illness that causes hyperthyroidism
- *Hashimoto's thyroiditis* – an autoimmune disorder that causes hypothyroidism and can sometimes cause hyperthyroidism



*The thyroid is a gland in the throat.*



*There are 4 parathyroid glands on the back side of the thyroid.*

- *Goiter* or *nodules*– growths on the thyroid
- *Hyperparathyroidism*– an illness where 1 or more of the parathyroid glands produce too many hormones

There are many ways to treat thyroid and parathyroid disease. Surgery is usually the last treatment option. It may be used if:

- Medicines are not correcting hormone levels
- Medicines are causing side effects or allergic reactions
- The thyroid has grown too large
- Radioactive iodine is not an option

Your doctor will treat your condition with *minimally invasive* surgery. This means your doctor will make very small incisions and use tiny instruments to remove the diseased gland.

## How do I prepare?

- **Aspirin and other medicines:** Do **not** take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting for 1 week before your procedure. Two of these are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). See attached sheet for more information.
- **Shaving:** Do **not** shave any part of your body that you do not already shave every day. If you normally shave near your surgical site, do **not** shave that area for 2 days (48 hours) before your surgery.
- **Plan ahead.** You will need a responsible adult to drive you home from the hospital when you are discharged.

## Day Before Surgery

- **Arrival time:** A pre-surgery nurse will call you by 5 p.m. the night before your surgery. If you are having surgery on a Monday, the nurse will call you the Friday before. If you do not receive this call by 5 p.m., please call 206.598.6334.

The nurse will tell you when to come to the hospital and remind you:

- Not to eat or drink after a certain time
- Which of your regular medicines to take or not take
- To sip only enough water to swallow your pills
- **Shower:** Take a shower the night before your surgery. Use the antibacterial soap your nurse gave you to wash your body.
  - Do **not** use the antibacterial soap on your face and hair. (See directions that came with the soap.) Use your own soap and shampoo on your face and hair.
  - Use clean towels to dry off, and put on clean clothing.

## **Surgery Day**

### **At Home**

- **Shower:** Take a shower in the morning of your surgery. Follow the same instructions as you did for your shower the night before surgery.

### **At the Hospital**

- **Heating blanket:** To reduce your risk of infection, we will cover you with a heating blanket while you wait to go into the operating room. This will warm your body and help prevent infection. Please ask for a heating blanket if you do not receive one.

## **Self-care After Surgery**

Medicine you receive during and after surgery will affect you. For 24 hours after your surgery, do **not**:

- Drive or travel alone
- Use machinery
- Drink alcohol
- Sign any legal papers or make important decisions
- Be responsible for children, pets, or an adult who needs care

### **Incision Care**

You will have an incision across the lower part of your neck. A *dressing* (bandage) will cover it. After you remove your dressing 2 days after your shower, check your incision daily for any sign of infection (see the back of this handout) or for rapid swelling.

### **Swelling**

To help lessen swelling, sleep with your head elevated at least 45 degrees. You can do this by propping up your head and neck on 3 pillows.

### **Bathing**

You may remove your dressing and take a shower 2 days after your surgery. Do **not** remove the Steri-Strips (white tape) over your incision. It will be removed at your follow-up visit. After you shower, pat your incision dry. Do not recover it. Leave it open to the air.

### **Pain Control**

Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) or the pain medicine your doctor prescribed to ease your pain. You can also apply ice to the incision area to help lessen any swelling. Do not place ice directly on your skin. Wrap the ice in a towel or cloth to protect your skin.

## Symptoms of Low Calcium

After surgery, your blood-calcium level may be low for a short time. Take Tums or Viactiv Calcium Soft Chews Plus Vitamins D & K, as you were instructed.

If you have any twitching, or if you have tingling around your mouth or in your fingertips or toes, take an extra dose of 2 or 3 Tums tablets or Viactiv chews. If your symptoms still do not lessen after you have taken 10 Tums tablets or Viactiv chews in 24 hours, call one of the phone numbers in the “Questions” box on this page.

## Activity and Work

- After surgery, your neck may be stiff.
- Do **not** drive until you are no longer taking prescription pain medicine and you can turn your head without pain.
- Most people take 1 to 2 weeks off work to recover.

## When to Call

Call the Nurse Advice Line or your doctor if you have:

- Trouble breathing
- Severe swelling of your neck
- Trouble swallowing
- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and chills
- Any sign of infection in your incision:

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or other healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about your health.

**UWMC Surgical Specialties Nurse Advice Line:** Call 206.598.4549 weekdays 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**SCCA Endocrine Clinic Nurse Line:** Call 206.606.1160 weekdays 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask to page the resident on call for Surgery.

Or, ask to page your surgeon:

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_