



Department of Surgery

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Thyroidectomy and Parathyroidectomy Patient Discharge Instructions

What should I expect after my operation?

- You will see *swelling* under the incision and/or *bruising* under it in a few days. This is usually greatest on the second or third day after the operation. You may also feel the sensation of swelling and/or of firmness that can last for a month or more.
- Neck incisions heal rapidly, within a week or two. *You can get them wet after about 24 hours.*
- Your scar will be most visible 1-2 months after the operation and gradually fade over the next 6-8 months. As it heals, a scar looks more pink or red than the skin around it.
- You may feel a firm *'healing ridge'* directly under the incision. This is normal and will soften and go away when healing is complete within 3-6 months.
- All incisions are *sensitive to sunlight*. For one year after surgery, you should use sunscreen when outdoors for long periods to prevent darkening of the scar area.
- We recommend that you *not expose* the incision to the *ultraviolet lights* used in tanning booths.

Will my neck hurt?

- Most patients experience very little pain, but you may feel *some neck stiffness/soreness* in your shoulder, back or neck and *tension headache* that takes a few days or weeks to go away completely.
- Some patients also notice minor changes in swallowing, which improve over time.
- The skin just above and below your incision will *feel numb*. This will improve over several months, but some persons may have a long-term decrease in sensation.
- You may apply cold pack over your incision to improve the pain.

How will I manage my pain at home?

- Take NSAIDS like ibuprofen (*Motrin, Advil*), naproxen (*Naprosyn, Aleve*) or acetaminophen (*Tylenol*) every 6 hours for the first 3-5 days after operation. This will minimize the pain you feel.
 - To **prevent Tylenol overdose**, do not take Tylenol at the same time as a combination narcotic dose that contains Tylenol, like *Vicodin and Percocet*. *However, you may take them 4-6 hours apart.*
 - If you have sore/stiff muscles in your back, shoulder or neck, you may use *moist warm heat or heating pad* on the affected areas 15-20 minutes at a time several times a day.
 - *Gently massaging* your neck muscles will improve the neck stiffness.
 - Do not be afraid to move your neck. *Gently flexing and stretching your neck muscles* will prevent stiffness.
 - Stronger pain medication or narcotic (like *Vicodin, Percocet or Darvocet*) for severe pain is rarely needed.
- If it is however, **DO NOT drive a car or drink alcohol** while taking these medications.
- Narcotics also cause **constipation**. Stool softeners (*Colace*) and fiber (fruits, bran, vegetables) and extra fluid intake helps. A stimulant laxative (*Milk of Magnesia, Senokot*) may be needed as well.

Will my voice be affected?

Your voice may be hoarse or weak at first, because the surgery took place near the voice box, but usually recovers within weeks. Some patients also notice a change in the pitch of their voices that affects singing. Rarely, these changes can be permanent.

Are there any diet restrictions?

No, return to your previous diet and always eat a well balanced diet, low in fat, etc.

How will I care for my incision?

- If you have *paper “steri strips”* on your incision, leave them in place until they begin to fall off naturally. If they become discolored or messy, you may remove them 7-10 days after your operation.
- If you have a skin glue closure (*dermabond or indermil*) closure, you may notice tiny pieces of yellow material on your washcloth as the glue washes off
- You may shower then gently pat dry your incision.
- **Do not** apply ointments or powders.
- Avoid using Vitamin E cream or other moisturizers on the incision until after your first follow-up visit.

What new medications might I take home?

- **Calcium supplement:** Your body’s calcium levels may fall after a *total thyroidectomy* or *parathyroid operation*. We recommend you purchase **Os-Cal 500** (one tablet equals 1250mg calcium carbonate). You may be taking 3-6 tablets per day, depending on your doctor’s recommendation. You will need to take calcium at different times to avoid medication interaction. Ask your pharmacists, nurse, or doctor about specific interactions.
- **Thyroid Hormone:** If you have had a thyroid operation, you may be prescribed thyroid hormone replacement, called **levothyroxine** (*Synthroid, Levothroid, etc.*). **You should not take this within 1 hour of taking your calcium supplements as this can interfere with absorption.** A blood test will be done in 6-8 weeks to ensure the dosage is correct by your doctor or your surgeon.
- **Vitamin D:** If your doctor has prescribed a Vitamin D supplement, like **Calcitriol** (*Rocaltrol*). This should be filled before you leave Montefiore Medical Center, because most pharmacies do not regularly stock this medication.

When can I go back to normal activities?

- You may return to work in 5-7 days or sooner if desired. *Contact the clinic coordinator if you need employer forms completed*
- You may drive as long as you are **not** taking any narcotics and your neck stiffness is resolved.

Can I resume my previous medications?

- Yes, unless directed not to by your doctor.
- Before discharge, **be sure to review your previous medications with your doctor or inpatient medical team.**

If you need a Radioiodine Thyroid Scan?

- If you have a specific type of thyroid cancer you may need a Radioiodine Thyroid Scan. Your doctor will talk to you about this at discharge or on follow up in the clinic.

Follow-up visit:

You will be scheduled for a return visit to Endocrine Surgery Clinic in 2-3 weeks. You will be mailed the appointment time.

When do I call for advice?

- If your temperature > 100.5
- You have trouble talking or breathing
- Your fingers/ hands or face or around your lips becomes numb and tingling (may mean your calcium level is low).
- You have trouble swallowing
- Your incision becomes swollen, red or drainage Occurs

Contact information:

Call the General Surgery Clinic Monday – Friday, 9am - 5pm at (718) 920-4800

After hours (5pm-9am) or on weekends please call Montefiore Medical Center Moses Division and ask to speak to the general surgery resident on call at (718) 920-4321