

Postoperative Instructions (Hemithyroidectomy)

Below are general instructions and information for patients who have had hemithyroidectomy.

Monitoring Your Progress

You should feel improvement every day after surgery. If you have any questions regarding your progress, call the hospital or your GP. You should have a follow up appointment approximately 2-4 weeks after your surgery. You will need to ring the office if an appointment has not yet been made.

Incision Care

You will have stitches on the inside that dissolve on their own. You will have a waterproof dressing so that you can shower or bathe (but do not submerge the incision). **You can remove the dressing after about two weeks.** You may see thickened skin glue which is applied to the wound to assist healing process and it will flake off by itself, usually after 3 to 4 weeks. Do not peel off the skin glue; otherwise you may be at risk of wound infection. If you experience itching once the dressing is off, you may apply lotion to the scar.

Pain

The main complaint following thyroid surgery is discomfort with swallowing and slight dull ache or sharp pain at incision. Panadol and/or Neurofen is generally enough to control this pain. Some people prefer Panadeine, but in general, stronger medications are not necessary.

After Surgery Symptoms

It is common to have a variety of symptoms after surgery. Most common symptoms are tiredness, sore throat, numbness of the skin around the wound and neck tightness. You may also feel like you have phlegm in your throat. This is usually because there was a tube in your windpipe while you were asleep that caused irritation that you perceive as phlegm. This should clear up in one to two weeks.

Some of these symptoms can persist for many months, but in most cases it will eventually resolve.

You may also notice with fluctuations in volume and clarity (mild hoarseness) of your voice. Your voice may get weaker with prolonged use. This can last for variable periods of time, but should clear in 4-6 months at most. There is a small (1/100) risk of permanent hoarseness. There is a higher chance your singing voice will be affected.

You may develop small local neck swelling and bruising near incision after surgery. Some patients may develop neck swelling due to seroma (fluid collection inside the wound) which is not associated with skin infection. This can happen after surgery and seroma may take about one to two weeks to slowly resolve leading to reduction in swelling. Some patients may develop skin flap swelling (wound flap edema as patient with a lower neck incision can cause more disruption in the skin lymphatic and venous circulation) and this may take three to four weeks to settle.

Scar Formation

Occasionally, patients get tethering of the scar on the inside, resulting in a tight feeling when swallowing or tilting the head back. Scar massage is an effective way to decrease scar tissue build up and help make scars less noticeable by softening and flattening it.

You should start massaging your scars about three weeks after surgery. Use soft tips of your fingers to massage the scar and tissue around the scar. Massage in all three directions (circle, vertical and horizontal). You should apply as much pressure as you can tolerate. Massage lotion in, applying enough pressure to make the scar area lighten in color or turn white. Massage should be done two to three times daily for ten minutes each time.

You can use Silicone Strips to reduce scarring – to be worn 12 hours every day for 8 to 12 weeks after surgery.

Physical Restriction

In general, your activity level depends on the amount of discomfort you experience. **Most patients return to work in a week or two, and you are able to drive as soon as your head can be turned comfortably without prescription pain pills (this limitation is for driver safety), usually around one week after surgery.**

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Neck Exercise

Neck exercises after thyroid surgery can increase comfort and your range of motion. Patients can feel tight across the neck area where a scar is forming, and neck exercises can alleviate some of those feelings of discomfort. You need to lift your chin up and down, side to side and down to side. Repeat all of these exercises 10 times. You can perform them a couple of times per day.

Follow up with GP

1) Thyroid Hormone Tablets

Six weeks after the operation, you will need to follow with your GP to measure your thyroid hormone levels and the thyroxine dosage may be adjusted accordingly.

2) Any Concern

Please present to your GP or hospital if you are concern with any neck swelling and bruising, wound infection, severe cramping or breathing difficulty so that you can be reviewed by a medical doctor.