

## Thyroid Surgery

### Post Operative Instruction Sheet for Thyroid Surgery

#### How Long Will I Be in The Operating Room?

You will be in the operating room for about one to two hours with at least another 1 – 2 hours in the recovery room afterwards.

#### WHAT CAN I EXPECT AFTER THE OPERATION?

##### After Your Operation

- It is normal to feel tired, groggy and weak from the effects of anesthesia. Get out of bed with assistance for the first few hours.
- You will be able to move your head as you wish.
- You will have some soreness and stiffness in your neck from the operation.
- Some people will have a sore throat and/or hoarseness from the tube used for your anesthetic. Ice chips or throat spray may help your throat feel better.
- You may resume a regular diet as tolerated. You may want to start with soft food because it is normal to have some difficulty swallowing for the first few days after surgery.
- You may shower as usual after 24 hours. The incision may be gently washed, not scrubbed, with mild soap and water. Pat the area dry.
- Usually ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) is all that is needed for any neck pain and stiffness. If it is necessary, your surgeon may prescribe stronger pain medicines. Throat spray or lozenges may be used for a sore throat.
- You may be prescribed thyroid replacement hormone and supplemental calcium based on the type of surgery you had (total versus partial thyroidectomy)
- If you have a total thyroidectomy, you may have some mild numbness and tingling of your fingers and lips 2-5 days after surgery.

#### HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR MY INCISION TO HEAL?

- Neck incisions heal rapidly. They are watertight in about 24-36 hours allowing you to shower carefully. The incision normally heals fully within a few weeks. There is also swelling and a feeling of firmness under the incision that may last for a couple of months.
- The Dermabond used to close your incision will start peeling off 7-10 days after surgery.
- Most scars are most noticeable 1 – 2 months after operation and gradually become less so after several months. Until that time, you may notice the color is redder than surrounding skin. This is normal and will improve. However, this skin is sensitive to ultraviolet radiation so you should cover the incision with sunscreen when outdoors for extended periods of time to prevent darkening (hyperpigmentation) of the area.
- If you wish, you may use vitamin E cream or other moisturizers on the incision.

## WHEN CAN I GET BACK TO MY USUAL ACTIVITIES?

- Most people recover quickly from thyroid or parathyroid surgery. We encourage you to resume your normal routine as soon as possible, usually within a few days after returning home. Most patients are able to return to work in 7 – 10 days or sooner if desired.
- You may gradually resume your exercise routine 7 days after surgery.
- You may drive whenever you feel comfortable after a few days. You should not drive if you cannot yet comfortably turn your head or if you are taking narcotic pain medications.
- You are likely to have some stiffness in the front and the back of your neck, which may take a number of days or weeks to completely resolve.
- You should not be afraid to move your head and neck. Gently flexing and stretching your neck muscles will prevent you from having a neck that feels stiff. As long as it is not very painful, try touching your chin to your chest, and each shoulder – as well as looking up at the ceiling.
- The skin above and below your incision will be numb. In many people, this improves over a number of months, but some people may have permanently decreased sensation there.
- The mild sensation of “fullness” in your neck and some difficulty swallowing may also be present for up to 4-6 weeks.

## Follow Up

- You should be seen about 2 weeks after surgery in the office. This appointment should have been made by your doctor’s **Surgery Coordinator** at the time of scheduling the surgery. If you are unsure if you have a post operative appointment scheduled, please reach out to your doctor’s **Surgery Coordinator** to verify your post operative appointment.

## WHAT SHOULD I CALL THE DOCTOR FOR?

- Fever over 102 F that **DOES NOT** respond to Tylenol or Motrin. The fever may go up and down but if it does decrease with Tylenol or Motrin, it is OK to monitor
- Sudden increase in swelling of the neck incision
- Difficulty breathing
- Tingling or numbness around the lips and fingertips that is worsening despite supplemental calcium
- Severe cramping or spasm of muscles