

## Neck Surgery - Post Operative Instructions

### Surgery

Surgery involves general anesthesia, typically for 1-2 hours. Patients may be sedated for several hours after surgery and may remain sleepy for much of the day. You may have nausea or vomiting, but it usually goes away by the evening of surgery. Most patients stay one night in the hospital and are discharged the next day. Sometimes, patients can go home the evening of surgery. Some patients will have a drain in place after surgery – this is removed in the hospital or in the office after you leave.

### Incision

You can shower and wash your hair as usual starting 24 hours after surgery. You may wash in a bathtub if you are careful not to get your neck wet. If you have steri strips, keep dry for 5 days, after which it's all right to let water run over the area. The steri strips usually come off after one week. If you have sutures, place antibiotic ointment on the incision 2 times per day. Use a dab of Bacitracin ointment on your drain site before and after showering for the first 2 days after surgery. Do not soak or scrub the incision. You might notice bruising around your incision or upper chest and slight swelling above the scar when you are upright. In addition, the scar may become pink and hard. This hardening will peak at about 3 weeks and may result in some tightness or difficulty swallowing, which will disappear over the next 2 to 3 months.

You should apply sunscreen on your incision site starting 3 weeks after surgery EVERY day for the first year after surgery. This will prevent a red or pink scar and give you the best cosmetic result for your scar. A daily moisturizer with sunscreen (example Oil of Olay with SPF 15) is fine.

### Limitations

- Limit your activity for the first 24 hours after surgery. You may then gradually resume your usual activities as you feel up to it
- No heavy lifting or pushing, active sports, strenuous exercise, or heavy household work for 2 weeks
- Objects that cannot be lifted with one hand are considered too heavy
- You may walk and do light household activities
- You may plan to return to work in 1-2 weeks, or as instructed

### Medication

Pain medication should be used for pain as prescribed. Pain is expected after surgery. Your neck will be sore, and pain will be worse when the neck is stretched and when you swallow. As the surgical site heals, pain will go away over the course of a week. It is not uncommon for pain to get worse when you first go home because your activity may increase. From that point on, the pain should improve every day. Pain medications can cause nausea, which can be prevented if you take them with food or milk.

Take all of your routine medications as prescribed, unless told otherwise by your surgeon. Any medications that thin the blood should be avoided. These include aspirin and aspirin-like products (Advil, Motrin, Excedrin, Alleve, Celebrex, Naproxyn).

### Pain

The main complaint following thyroid surgery is pain with swallowing and neck movement. Some people experience a dull ache, while others feel a sharp pain. This should not keep you from eating anything you want, and will improve daily after surgery.

### Cough

If your operation was done under general anesthesia, you may feel like you have phlegm in your throat or a sore throat. This is usually irritation caused by a tube in your windpipe while you were asleep. You will notice that if you cough, very little phlegm will come up. This should clear up in 4 to 5 days.

### **Reasons to Call Your Surgeon's Office**

- Persistent fever over 101° F
- Bleeding from the neck incision
- Increasing neck swelling
- Pain that is not relieved by your medications
- Drainage of pus from the incision
- Redness surrounding the incision that is worsening or getting bigger
- Bleeding is possible after surgery, and the most serious cases may cause trouble breathing. Symptoms include rapid swelling in the neck, trouble breathing, and red and purple discoloration of the skin over the incision. Please call doctor immediately, or if trouble breathing is present, call 911 or go to the closest emergency room