

# After Your Thyroid Surgery

## Dartmouth General Hospital

If you have had your whole thyroid taken out, you will have to take a thyroid hormone pill every day for the rest of your life. The dose may need to be adjusted over time. We will ask your primary health care provider or endocrinologist (a doctor who treats diseases that affect your glands) to do blood tests 6 weeks after you start your thyroid hormone pill. Your hormone dose will be adjusted as needed.

If you have only had half of your thyroid taken out and you still have the other half, we will arrange for blood tests to check your thyroid function in 3 months.

It may take up to 6 weeks to get the test results, depending on the size of your thyroid. If you have not heard from Dartmouth ENT (Ear, Nose & Throat) 6 weeks after your surgery, please call our office at 902-435-8586.

### Post-operative instructions

#### Incision (cut)

Keep the incision dry for 3 days. After 3 days, you may shower and gently pat the incision dry. Use Q-tips® or gauze dipped in a mixture that is half hydrogen peroxide and half water to remove any dried blood over the incision (cut). After washing, apply an antibiotic ointment such as Polysporin® twice a day. If there are Steri-Strips™ over the incision, they will be removed in about a week when the stitch is removed.

If skin glue was used, you may shower right away. You do not need to use antibiotic ointment. The skin glue will slowly peel off after 1 to 2 weeks. If it has not all come off by your post-operative appointment, we will remove it.

Avoid any activity that pulls across the incision, such as shaving, for at least 2 weeks. You may shave the rest of your face. The stitch will be taken out about a week after surgery at your followup appointment with your surgeon.

#### Pain

Pain may be mild to moderate for the first 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days) after your surgery. It usually gets better after 2 days. Pain is best treated with throat lozenges.

You will get a prescription for pain relief, such as Tramacet®, depending on how much pain you have. Only use Tramacet® when you need it because it may make you feel dizzy and sick to your stomach. If Tramacet® is used for a few days it can also lead to constipation (not being able to poop). As your pain gets better, use extra strength acetaminophen (Tylenol® Extra Strength) instead.

## Head of bed

Raise the head of your bed 30 to 45 degrees or sleep in a recliner for 3 to 4 days to lessen swelling. The skin above your incision may look swollen after lying down for a few hours.

## Activity and diet

Do not strain, lift anything over 10 pounds, or do any vigorous (hard) exercise for 2 weeks after surgery. You may eat your regular diet after surgery. Use an ice pack on your neck for 10 minutes on and 10 minutes off, as needed to help with discomfort and swelling.

### Call your surgeon if you have:

- Any concerns. We are here to help you.
- More swelling in your neck with voice or breathing problems. This can be a sign of bleeding under the skin and needs to be treated right away. If you experience this, have someone drive you to the nearest Emergency Department (ED) and insist they call the ENT doctor on call in Halifax. **Swelling in the neck can lead to airway obstruction (trouble breathing) and be life-threatening.**
- Numbness or tingling around your mouth and/or in your fingers or toes, or muscle cramping and/or curling of your fingers or toes. This may be a sign of low blood calcium levels and may be life-threatening. If this happens and you have a prescription for Rocaltrol® and calcium tablets, follow these instructions:
  - › Eat and chew 2 calcium tablets and drink a glass of water.
  - › If you still feel tingling or numbness in your fingers or toes, or the tip of your nose 20 minutes later, eat and chew 2 more calcium tablets with another glass of water.
  - › If you still have symptoms after another 20 minutes, eat another 2 tablets of calcium, and go to the nearest ED. **You must have your blood calcium levels drawn right away.** Do not drive if you are having these symptoms. Have someone drive you to the nearest ED and tell staff to check your calcium level and call your surgeon.

**Bring these post-operative instructions with you to share with the ED.**

**\*\*If your blood calcium gets too low, you could have seizures or your heart could stop!**

**You must take this seriously!\*\***

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| • Fever over 38.6° C/101.5° F                 | • Large amount of bleeding                |
| • Bad-smelling discharge from your incision   | • Problems urinating (peeing)             |
| • More warmth or redness around your incision | • Pain that gets worse instead of better  |
|   | • Choking or coughing with food or liquid |

## Calling your surgeon:

1. If it is urgent, call 911 or go directly to the ED without calling.
2. If it is not urgent, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., call Dr. LeBlanc at 902-435-8586 or Dr. Balys at 902-435-8589.
3. If you have not reached a surgeon, or if it is after 4 p.m. or a weekend, call Hospital Locating at 902-473-2222. Ask that the operator page the ENT surgeon on call.

## Post-operative appointment

If you have stitches, you may need to have them taken out at your post-operative visit 7 to 10 days after surgery. Dissolvable stitches do not need to be removed unless they get infected. If this appointment has not been made for you, please call the ENT front desk at 902-435-8586.