

After Your Thyroid Surgery: What You Need to Know

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 exact dose may need to be adjusted over time. We will ask your family doctor or endocrinologist (a doctor who treats diseases that affect your glands) to do blood tests 6 weeks after starting your thyroid hormone. Your hormone dose will be adjusted as needed.

The final results of analysis of your thyroid may take up to 6 weeks, 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 902-435-8585.

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. After washing, apply an antibiotic ointment such as Polysporin® twice a day. If there are tiny Steri-Strips™ over the incision, leave them and they will be removed in about a week when the stitch is removed.

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

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

Pain

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

You will be given a prescription for pain relief such as Tramacet®, depending on how much pain you have. Only use Tramacet® when you need it because it can make you feel dizzy and sick to your stomach. If used for a few days it can also lead to constipation. As your pain improves, use extra-strength acetaminophen (Tylenol®) instead.

Head of bed

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

Activity and diet

Don't strain, or do heavy lifting or vigorous exercise for 2 weeks after surgery. You may eat your regular diet after surgery.

Call your surgeon if you have:

- Any concerns. We are here to help you.
- More swelling in your neck with voice or breathing difficulties. This can be a sign of bleeding under the skin and needs to be treated right away. 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 (difficulty breathing) and be life-threatening.**
- Numbness or tingling around your mouth and/or in your fingers or toes. This may be a sign of low blood calcium levels. Muscle cramping and/or curling of your fingers or toes could be due to very low blood calcium levels and may be life-threatening. **You must have your blood calcium levels drawn immediately.** You should not drive if you are having these symptoms. Take an extra calcium pill and have someone drive you to the nearest ED. Your calcium level must be checked and your surgeon called.

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!****

- Fever over 101.5°F / 38.6°C
- Bad-smelling discharge from your incision
- Increased warmth or redness around your incision
- Large amount of bleeding
- Problems urinating (peeing)
- 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. Ballys 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 will need to have them taken out at your post-operative visit 7-10 days after surgery. If you have skin glue, you will need to be seen about 2-3 weeks after surgery. If this appointment has not been made for you, please call the ENT front desk at 902-435-8586.