

Thyroid Surgery

If your doctor determines that you have thyroid cancer, or that you have another indication to remove all or part of your thyroid gland, you will need to undergo a “Thyroidectomy,” removal of the thyroid gland. The surgery will be done under general anesthesia with the patient asleep. The surgeon will make an incision across the lower front part of your neck to access the thyroid gland. Either part or all of the thyroid gland will be removed depending on the reason for the surgery and the biopsy results. The doctor will discuss this with you.

Risks of Thyroid Surgery Include (but not limited to):

- Injury to small nerves in the neck, which can cause problems with the vocal cords, and can cause a change in your voice
 - Bleeding/ Hematoma (blood collection under the skin at surgical area)
 - Seroma (collection of simple fluid under the skin)
 - Hypocalcemia (low calcium level due to removal of the parathyroid glands attached to the thyroid gland, which control your body’s calcium level); this may be temporary or permanent and you will need to take calcium supplements
 - Infection
 - Hypothyroidism – low level of thyroid hormones (this is a definite side effect if the entire thyroid is removed, and you would need to take a medication to replace the thyroid hormones long term)
 - Need for further surgery or other procedures
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Recovery after Thyroid Surgery

You will likely be hospitalized for 1-3 days following surgery to watch closely for any complications or bleeding. You may have a small surgical drain in your neck after surgery to collect any fluid, and to prevent fluid from building up under the skin. Most people are able to return to their normal activities within a week. Ask your doctor about any specific restrictions after surgery.

You will be started on a calcium and vitamin D supplement before leaving the hospital to prevent low calcium levels after surgery. You will likely be on calcium and vitamin D supplements for at least 6 weeks. Your primary care doctor will test your calcium levels and decide when you can stop taking the calcium.

If your entire thyroid is removed, you will need to be on Thyroid Hormone replacement medications for your lifetime. If part of the thyroid is removed, you may or may not need Thyroid Hormone replacement depending on how your thyroid gland functions after surgery or treatment for thyroid cancer.