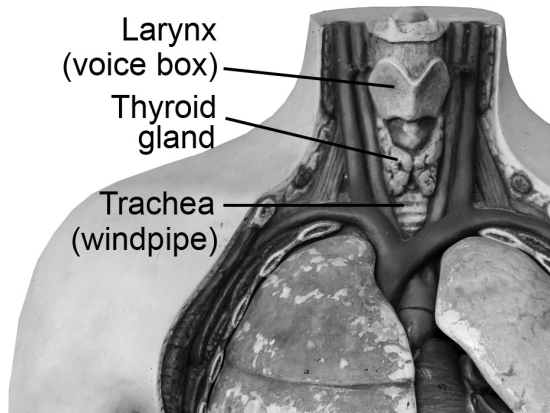


The thyroid is a gland in the neck just below the voice box. It wraps around the windpipe. The thyroid makes hormones that control many processes in your body. For example, thyroid hormones help keep your body temperature steady. They also help with healthy hair and skin.



Location of the thyroid gland

A thyroidectomy is surgery to take out all or part of the thyroid gland. It is often part of the treatment for thyroid cancer. Your surgeon may also take out lymph nodes in the neck to see if cancer has spread. For more information, please see the *About Lymph Node Surgery* factsheet.

After thyroid surgery, you may need medicine to help your body replace hormones the thyroid made.

Side Effects

Low calcium. Often the amount of calcium in your blood goes down after thyroid surgery. Your care team will tell you if you need to take calcium or vitamin D supplements for a while. Usually, the calcium levels return to normal on their own.

Voice changes. Sometimes the surgery can damage nerves that help control your voice. This can cause changes to your voice. The changes may or may not go away on their own. Nerve damage is not common. If it happens, your doctors may do a procedure or have you work with a speech therapist to restore your voice.

Pain. After any surgery, some pain is normal. While you are in the hospital, your care team will do their best to help control your pain. They will ask you often about how much pain you are feeling. This helps your care team decide what pain medicines will work best for you. They may put pain medicine directly into your veins through an IV or give you pills.

When you go home, you will get a prescription for the same pain pills you took in the hospital. Follow the directions for your medicines. Tell your care team if your pain level stays the same or gets worse.

Infection. Any time you have a cut in your skin, there is a risk of infection. Good hand washing is the best and easiest way to prevent infection. Wash or disinfect your hands often, especially after using the bathroom, before eating, and before touching the area of your surgery. Make sure your caregivers and visitors do, too.

Watch for these signs that show an infection may be starting:

- More pain, redness, or warmth at your surgery area
- More blood or fluid coming from your surgery area
- A fever higher than 100.3° F

If you notice any of these signs, call your care team right away.

Swelling. Swelling around the surgery area can cause pressure on your throat. This can make it hard to breathe. The surgeon will put tubes to drain fluids from the surgery area to help prevent swelling. While you are in the hospital, nurses will connect a suction device to the tubes to help remove the fluid. Your nurses will check the fluid often to make sure there is no sign of an infection.

Swelling can also make it hard to swallow. The swelling should get better a few days after surgery. Tell your care team or speech and swallowing therapist if you cannot drink liquids or if you have questions about what you should eat and drink.

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Bleeding. Your head and neck have many blood vessels, so bleeding is a risk during this surgery. Your nurses will check the fluid from the drain tubes for signs of too much bleeding. Some bleeding is common right after surgery, but the fluid that drains becomes more yellow as you heal.

Pneumonia. Pneumonia is a very serious lung infection. Staying in bed too much keeps your lungs from expanding all the way. This can raise the risk of getting pneumonia after surgery. To help prevent pneumonia, your nurses will ask you to start walking as soon after your surgery as it is safe. This helps keep your lungs in good shape.

Blood clots. Not being active raises the risk of blood clots in your legs. If a clot happens, it can move through the veins to your lungs. This can be deadly. To help prevent blood clots, your nurses will ask you to get up and move around as much as you can. While you are in the hospital, your care team may put foam boots on your legs. The boots inflate and deflate to keep the blood in your leg veins moving so it cannot clot. Your doctor may also prescribe a blood thinner medicine to help prevent blood clots.

Your Notes
