

Thyroidectomy for Suspected Cancer (Nodule)

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is a thyroidectomy?

The thyroid gland is a structure in your neck that produces a hormone called thyroxine, which regulates your body's metabolism.

A thyroidectomy involves removing all or part of your thyroid gland. Your surgeon may also recommend removing the lymph nodes from around the thyroid gland or in the side of your neck.

Thyroid cancer is a harmful growth that starts in the tissue of the thyroid gland.

Thyroid cancer may spread to the lymph nodes (glands) in your neck, and to other areas of your body such as your lungs or bones. Depending on the type of thyroid cancer, you may need further treatment such as radiotherapy or chemotherapy.

What are the benefits of surgery?

Surgery is recommended so that your doctor can be sure about what is causing the lump.

A thyroidectomy gives you the best chance of being free of cancer. You will no longer have the lump in your thyroid gland and any symptoms caused by the swelling should improve.

The thyroid tissue that your surgeon removes will be examined under a microscope to find out if cancer is present. This will help decide on any further treatment.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

If cancer is suspected, surgery is the only dependable way of confirming the diagnosis. If cancer is present, surgery also gives you the best chance of being free of thyroid cancer.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes 1 to 2 hours depending on which type of thyroidectomy you are having.

Your surgeon will make a cut on your neck in the line of one of your skin creases.

Your surgeon will remove part, or all, of the thyroid gland. If necessary, they will remove any lymph nodes from around your thyroid gland

through the same cut. Sometimes your surgeon may find other problems which they may be able to treat during the operation.

They will stitch the deep tissues and close your skin to leave a neat scar.

What complications can happen?

Some complications can be serious and can even be life-threatening.

General complications of any operation

- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Blood clot in your leg
- Blood clot in your lung
- Chest infection

Specific complications of this operation

- Bleeding
- Change in your voice
- Aspiration problems
- Drop in calcium levels in your blood
- Thyroid hormone levels in your blood may drop
- Breathing difficulties

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain
- Unsightly scarring of your skin

How soon will I recover?

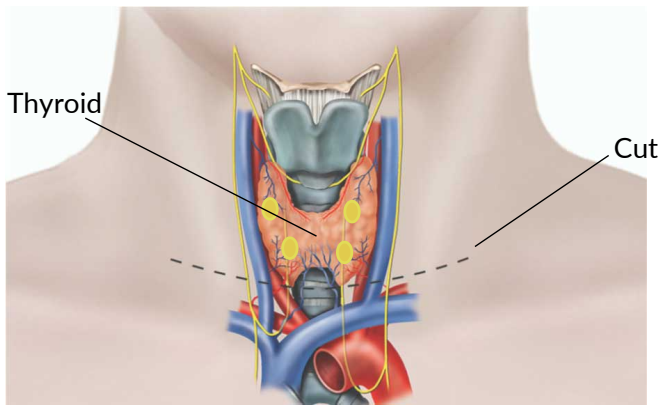
You should be able to go home after 1 to 2 days.

You should be able to return to work and normal activities after about 2 weeks, depending on how much surgery you need and your type of work.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a full recovery and can return to normal activities.

The healthcare team will usually arrange for you to come back to the clinic within 4 weeks but you may have a telephone follow-up appointment.



A thyroidectomy

The tissue that your surgeon removed will have been examined under a microscope. Your surgeon will tell you the results and discuss with you any treatment or follow-up you need.

Summary

A thyroid lump can be caused by cancer. A thyroidectomy involves removing all or part of your thyroid gland. This gives you the best chance of being free of cancer, and helps your surgeon to decide if you need any further treatment.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

Acknowledgements

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Illustrator

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