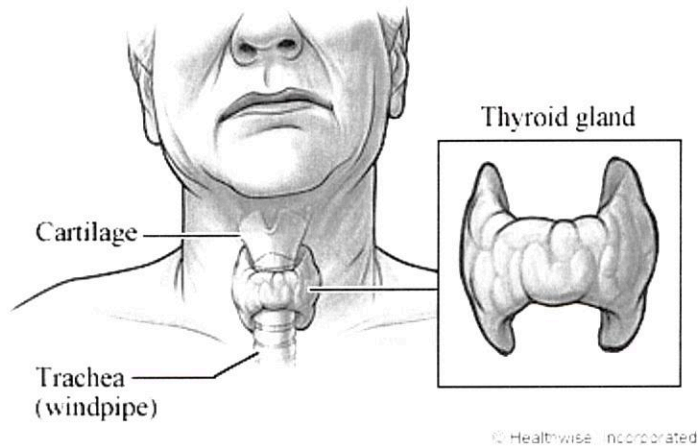


# Thyroidectomy: Before Your Surgery

## What is a thyroidectomy?



A thyroidectomy is surgery to take out your thyroid gland. This gland is shaped like a butterfly. It lies across the windpipe (trachea). The gland makes hormones that control how your body makes and uses energy (metabolism). A doctor removes the gland when it gets too big, does not work right, or has a tumor. Most tumors that grow in this gland are benign. This means they are not cancer.

The doctor will take out the thyroid through a cut (incision) in the front of your neck. You will likely have a tube, called a drain, in your neck to let fluid out of the cut. The drain is most often taken out before you go home.

You may go home on the same day. Or you may stay one or more nights in the hospital. You may return to work or your normal routine in 1 to 2 weeks. This depends on whether you need more treatment and how you feel. It may also depend on the kind of work you do.

Your doctor will check your incision in about a week. You may need to take thyroid medicine. If you have thyroid cancer, you may need to have radioactive iodine therapy. Your doctor will talk to you about what happens next.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## What happens before surgery?

Surgery can be stressful. This information will help you understand what you can expect. And it will help you safely prepare for surgery.

## **Preparing for surgery**

- Understand exactly what surgery is planned, along with the risks, benefits, and other options.
- Tell your doctors ALL the medicines, vitamins, supplements, and herbal remedies you take. Some of these can increase the risk of bleeding or interact with anesthesia.
- If you take blood thinners, such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), or aspirin, be sure to talk to your doctor. He or she will tell you if you should stop taking these medicines before your surgery. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do.
- Your doctor will tell you which medicines to take or stop before your surgery. You may need to stop taking certain medicines a week or more before surgery. So talk to your doctor as soon as you can.
- If you have an advance directive, let your doctor know. It may include a living will and a durable power of attorney for health care. Bring a copy to the hospital. If you don't have one, you may want to prepare one. It lets your doctor and loved ones know your health care wishes. Doctors suggest that everyone prepare these papers before any type of surgery or procedure.

## **What happens on the day of surgery?**

- Follow the instructions exactly about when to stop eating and drinking. If you don't, your surgery may be canceled. If your doctor told you to take your medicines on the day of surgery, take them with only a sip of water.
- Take a bath or shower before you come in for your surgery. Do not apply lotions, perfumes, deodorants, or nail polish.
- Do not shave the surgical site yourself.
- Take off all jewelry and piercings. And take out contact lenses, if you wear them.

## **At the hospital or surgery center**

- Bring a picture ID.
- The area for surgery is often marked to make sure there are no errors.
- You will be kept comfortable and safe by your anesthesia provider. You will be asleep during the surgery.
- How long your surgery takes depends on how complex it is.

## **Going home**

- Be sure you have someone to drive you home. Anesthesia and pain medicine make it unsafe for you to drive.
- You will be given more specific instructions about recovering from your surgery. They will cover things like diet, wound care, follow-up care, driving, and getting back to your normal routine.

## When should you call your doctor?

- You have questions or concerns.
- You don't understand how to prepare for your surgery.
- You become ill before the surgery (such as fever, flu, or a cold).
- You need to reschedule or have changed your mind about having the surgery.

### Where can you learn more?

Go to <http://www.healthwise.net/ed>

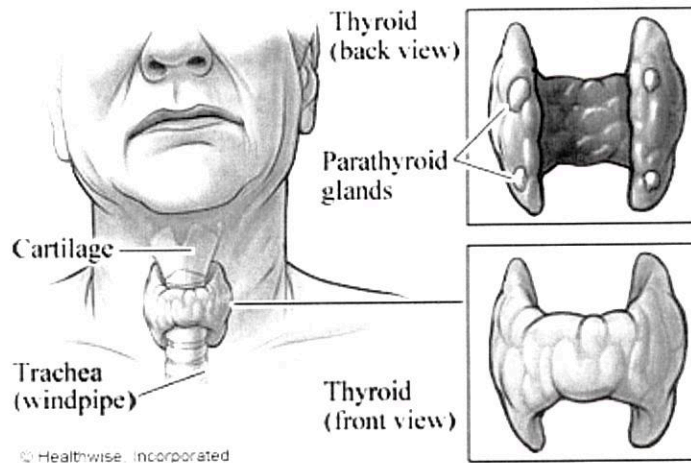
Enter **Y083** in the search box to learn more about "**Thyroidectomy:  
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# Thyroidectomy: What to Expect at Home

## Your Recovery



Thyroidectomy is the removal of the thyroid gland, which is shaped like a butterfly and lies across the windpipe (trachea). The gland makes hormones that control how your body makes and uses energy (metabolism). A doctor removes the gland when a tumor is present. The doctor may also remove the gland if you have an enlarged thyroid that is causing symptoms that bother you. Most tumors that grow in the thyroid gland are benign, meaning they are not cancer.

You may leave the hospital with stitches in the cut (incision) the doctor made. Your doctor will tell you if you need to come back to have these removed. You may still have a tube called a drain in your neck. Your doctor will take this out a few days after your surgery.

You may have some trouble chewing and swallowing after you go home. Your voice probably will be hoarse, and you may have trouble talking. For most people, these problems get better within 3 to 4 months, but it can take as long as a year. In some cases, this surgery causes permanent problems with chewing, speaking, or swallowing.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover. But each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to get better as quickly as possible.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

### Activity

- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover. When you lie down, put two or three pillows under your head to keep it raised.
- Try to walk each day. Start by walking a little more than you did the day before. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk. Walking boosts blood flow and helps prevent pneumonia and constipation.

- Avoid strenuous physical activity and lifting heavy objects for 3 weeks after surgery or until your doctor says it is okay.
- Do not over-extend your neck backwards for 2 weeks after surgery.
- Ask your doctor when you can drive again.
- You may take a shower, unless you still have a drain near your incision. Pat the incision dry. If you have a drain, follow your doctor's instructions to care for it.

## Diet

- If it is painful to swallow, start out with cold drinks, flavored ice pops, and ice cream. Next, try soft foods like pudding, yogurt, canned or cooked fruit, scrambled eggs, and mashed potatoes. Avoid eating hard or scratchy foods like chips or raw vegetables. Avoid orange or tomato juice and other acidic foods that can sting the throat.
- If you cough right after drinking, try drinking thicker liquids, such as a smoothie.
- You may notice that your bowel movements are not regular right after your surgery. This is common. Try to avoid constipation and straining with bowel movements. You may want to take a fiber supplement every day. If you have not had a bowel movement after a couple of days, ask your doctor about taking a mild laxative.

## Medicines

- Your doctor will tell you if and when you can restart your medicines. He or she will also give you instructions about taking any new medicines.
- If you take blood thinners, such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), or aspirin, be sure to talk to your doctor. He or she will tell you if and when to start taking those medicines again. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do.
- Be safe with medicines. Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- If you think your pain medicine is making you sick to your stomach:
  - Take your medicine after meals (unless your doctor has told you not to).
  - Ask your doctor for a different pain medicine.
- Your doctor may prescribe calcium to prevent problems after surgery from low calcium. Not having enough calcium can cause symptoms such as tingling around your mouth or in your hands and feet.
- Your doctor may have prescribed antibiotics. Take them as directed. Do not stop taking them just because you feel better. You need to take the full course of antibiotics.

## Incision care

- If your doctor told you how to care for your incision, follow your doctor's instructions. If you did not get instructions, follow this general advice:
  - After the first 24 to 48 hours, wash around the wound with clean water 2 times a day. Don't use hydrogen peroxide or alcohol, which can slow healing.
- You may have a drain near your incision. Your doctor will tell you how to take care of it.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## When should you call for help?

**Call 911** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You have sudden chest pain and shortness of breath, or you cough up blood.
- You have severe trouble breathing.

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have loose stitches, or your incision comes open.
- Bleeding from your incision soaks through your bandages.
- You have signs of infection, such as:
  - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
  - Red streaks leading from the incision.
  - Pus draining from the incision.
  - A fever.
- You have a tingling feeling around your mouth.
- You have cramping or tingling in your hands and feet.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You have trouble talking.
- You are sick to your stomach or cannot keep fluids down.
- You do not have a bowel movement after taking a laxative.

### Where can you learn more?

Go to <http://www.healthwise.net/ed>

Enter **D009** in the search box to learn more about "**Thyroidectomy: What to Expect at Home.**"

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