



CommunityENT

EAR • NOSE • THROAT • ALLERGY

Dr. Brian Hawkins, Dr. Joseph Creely and Jocelyn Jones PA-C
4950 Norton Healthcare Blvd Suite 209. Louisville, KY 40241

Phone (502)425-5556

www.communityent.com

Parathyroidectomy Post Operative Instructions

What are the parathyroids?

The parathyroid glands help control the levels of calcium and phosphorus in the blood. Parathyroid glands regulate the calcium by producing a hormone called Parathyroid Hormone (PTH). Calcium is a very important element in our bodies and calcium controls many organ systems in our body.

What happens during surgery?

During surgery, you are asleep under general anesthesia. The surgeon will make an incision on your neck and expose the four parathyroid glands. If your glands are in an abnormal position, the surgeon may need to explore the front of your neck to find them. Depending on your condition, the surgeon will remove the diseased or enlarged parathyroid glands. If the surgeon suspects cancer, he/she may remove additional tissue surrounding the glands. The incision will be closed with sutures or staples depending on your surgeon.

How should I prepare for parathyroid surgery?

You should discontinue any aspirin or anti-inflammatory medications for 7 days prior to the surgery. This will significantly reduce your bleeding risk. If you are on any blood thinners, you will need to consult with the surgeon and the prescribing physician on how to discontinue those medications before surgery.

Prepare to be off work for 7-10 days after your parathyroid surgery. Strenuous occupations may require up to 14 days off.

What are the possible complications?

There is a nerve that controls your voice and your ability to close your vocal cords when swallowing. This is called the recurrent laryngeal nerve. This nerve runs very close to the parathyroid and if injured it can cause temporary or permanent paralysis of the nerve. We tediously dissect out the nerve in an effort to avoid this complication. The paralysis can cause trouble swallowing, choking, aspiration and changes in voice. In rare cases if bilateral paralysis happens, the patient may need a tracheotomy. There are other nerves in this area if injured could cause temporary/permanent changes in the pitch of your voice.

Hypocalcemia is a risk of this surgery. You have four parathyroid glands and they sit directly behind the thyroid. These glands are about the size of a seed. The parathyroids control the amount of calcium in your bloodstream. If inadvertently removed, you may end up needing calcium supplement temporarily or permanently. Hypocalcemia can cause numbness, tingling, cramping, heart arrhythmias, mental status changes, spasms of the vocal cords etc. This is another reason you are in the hospital overnight.

There is always a risk with any surgery of bleeding and wound infection.

There is a risk that the wound will not heal well causing a cosmetic deformity.

The thyroid is right by the trachea(windpipe) if the airway becomes compromised this could require a tracheotomy. This is very rare.

There is a risk of hematoma. This is when a large blood clot forms in the surgical cavity after surgery. This can be serious and is one of the reasons you are kept overnight.

What can I expect after surgery?

You may be in the hospital for 1-2 days depending on your condition. You may have swelling, discomfort in your neck and find it difficult to talk. If the muscles in your neck were cut, you may need a headrest until it heals.

What do I need to do at home

You should rest and avoid picking up any heavy objects (nothing over 5-10lbs)

You can eat normally. If you start having choking episodes when you eat, you need to call the office.

You will get a prescription for pain medication. If you are taking this medication you cannot drive a car and you may need assistance at home. If you notice you are running low on prescription pain medicine, please call the office and talk to one of our providers to see if a refill is appropriate. You can use Tylenol for pain.

When do I f/u with my doctor?

Typically the first follow up appointment is 7-14 days after surgery

When should I call my doctor?

Call the Office if:

- You develop a fever, have redness, swelling or increasing pain in the neck wound
- You are having difficulty breathing
- If you are having trouble swallowing and feel like you are choking or coughing when eating
- You have uncontrollable numbness/tingling around the mouth, spasms in your hand/feet, cramping in your legs, feet or hands or you feel your heart is not beating normally

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