

## General concerns

You may have some mild **itching** at the incision site as it heals. It is not uncommon to have some skin **numbness** around the incision or under the chin. This will resolve in a few weeks. Some **bruising** may also occur at the incision site which will disappear in a few days. Some patients have a feeling of a **lump** or pressure in the throat when they swallow. This will also get better as you heal. Some **neck stiffness, ear congestion or pain, and headache** may occur after surgery. This can be relieved with *Tylenol*. Anesthesia may cause some nausea in the first 24 hours after surgery.

It is not unusual to have periods of **fatigue** for several weeks after surgery. You may also be **moody** or irritable because of the stress of the surgery, hospitalization and anesthesia.

## Emergencies

Please call if you have a **fever** greater than 101.5°F, or if you have unusual symptoms, such as continued **drainage** from the incision, increasing **redness** or **swelling** of the neck area, constant **numbness of the fingers**, repeated **choking** or **difficulty breathing**.

## Follow-up

Please schedule a **follow-up visit** with my secretary for two weeks after surgery. During this visit your neck will be examined and your pathology report will be discussed.

**Please call my office if you have any questions.**

**This brochure is also available at:**  
[www.CooperHealth.org/thyroid](http://www.CooperHealth.org/thyroid)

**Lisa M. Reid, MD**

Cooper University Hospital  
3 Cooper Plaza, Suite 411  
Camden, NJ  
856-968-7355



**Head & Neck  
Surgery**

**Post-Operative  
Instructions**

For Thyroid & Parathyroid  
Surgery Patients

 **Cooper**  
University Hospital

## Activity

Most patients are able to resume light work one week after surgery, and **return** to full-time **employment in two weeks**. If your job requires heavy lifting you may require a longer recovery time. Wait one week after surgery before resuming **driving**. If you still require pain medication you need to wait longer before you drive.

You may **walk** after surgery. More vigorous exercise such as weight lifting, tennis, skiing or swimming should not be restarted for at least four weeks after surgery. You may have sexual relations

## Diet



Neck surgery requires the surgeon to operate around your voice box (larynx) and your swallowing tube (esophagus). This may cause **hoarseness** or some discomfort with **swallowing** for a few days after surgery. You should be able to eat regular food by the time you leave the hospital, although **softer foods** (eggs, mashed potatoes, etc) may be easier to swallow initially.

Patients who have had parathyroid surgery may require extra calcium supplements after surgery. Eating foods rich in **calcium**, such as milk, yogurt, cheese, spinach and broccoli, will also help.

## Neck incision

You will have an incision across the lower part of the neck placed along your natural skin creases. This will help minimize **scarring**. The sutures left inside your skin will **dissolve** on their own. Your incision will be covered with adhesive tape strips called **Steri-Strips**. They will be removed when you return to my office after the surgery. You may **shower** two days after surgery with the *Steri-Strips* in place; just pat the area dry. You do not need to keep the incision covered.

While you will be able to move your neck, avoid stretching your neck, lifting your chin severely or bending over.

It is common to have some swelling over the incision for a few weeks after surgery. Sleeping with the head of your bed elevated helps reduce swelling.

Avoid exposing the incision to direct **sunlight**; you may wear sunscreen after the tape strips are removed.

## Bathing

Avoid getting the neck incision **wet** for two days after surgery. You may sponge bathe for those two days, after which you can shower and dab the neck area dry. **Avoid scrubbing** the neck area until the tape strips are removed.



## Medications

If you had your entire thyroid removed you will need to be on a **medication** called *Synthroid* or *Levoxyl*. These replace thyroid hormone and are identical to the **thyroid hormone** your body makes. The medication is taken once a day, every day. It is best taken on an empty stomach. If you require calcium pills do not take both medications at the same time. Your thyroid levels will be monitored periodically with a **blood test**.



Your **calcium levels** may be temporarily low after surgery. Symptoms include numbness around the mouth or at the fingertips. These may be relieved with a high calcium diet (milk, cheese, broccoli, spinach) or by taking **calcium and vitamin D supplements** for a few weeks. If you have been prescribed calcium or vitamin D—take as directed. Your calcium level will be checked before you leave the hospital and at your follow-up visit.

**Pain** is usually minimal after surgery. You may require a narcotic for pain for the first day or two after surgery but most patients do not.

*Tylenol* is usually adequate for pain relief once you go home.