

## THYROIDECTOMY

### Post- Operative Instructions

#### What to expect:

**Hypocalcemia:** You may experience a low calcium level after surgery. Symptoms could include numbness and tingling around your lips, hands, and the bottoms of your feet, muscle cramps and spasms. Call Dr. Dent immediately if you are having any of these symptoms as low calcium can be life threatening. You may need to take calcium carbonate (e.g. Tums) or calcium gluconate along with a synthetic Vitamin D tablet after surgery. You may need to have calcium levels in your blood checked.

**Hypothyroidism:** If you have a total thyroidectomy, you will develop hypothyroidism and need to take synthetic thyroid hormone for the rest of your life. If you have a lobectomy or subtotal thyroidectomy, you may have hypothyroidism and you may need to take thyroid medicine for the rest of your life although this is not typical if you have normal thyroid function.

**Neck tension and tenderness** -- Your tendency may be to hold your head stiffly in one position after surgery, this can cause neck and muscle tension. It's good to do gentle stretching and range of motion exercises to prevent muscle stiffness in the neck area.

**Hoarseness:** You may develop hoarseness or notice a change in your voice. If the recurrent laryngeal nerve or the superior laryngeal nerve (nerves that control your vocal cords for voice) was stretched, bruised, or mildly injured then recovery can take weeks to months. If the voice does not return you may need a procedure to help improve the voice.

**Pain:** Pain can be mild to moderate the first 24 – 48 hours, but usually declines thereafter. As your pain lessens, try using extra-strength acetaminophen (Tylenol) instead of your narcotic medication.

**Swelling/Incision:** The incision is raised on purpose so that as it heals and contracts the scar will flatten and not widen. Also the skin above the incision will be more swollen for several weeks-months due to change in lymphatic drainage. This will flatten out as well.

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**Incision:** Please keep the incision dry for 2-3 days and apply a thin film of an antibacterial ointment (e.g. Polysporin). Please avoid any activity that pulls across the incision such as shaving across the incision for at least 2 weeks. The stitches will be removed 5-8 days after surgery.

**Head of Bed:** Please elevate the head of your bed 30-45 degrees or sleep in a recliner at 30-45 degrees for the first 3-4 days to decrease swelling.

**Activity:** Please avoid any activity that raises your blood pressure for one week, e.g. heavy lifting, strenuous exercise, etc.

**Diet:** You may eat your regular diet after surgery.

Prior to your surgery the scheduler should have called in your medications and scheduled your first post-operative visit. If unable to reach Dr. Dent with an *urgent* or *severe* problem, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.