Thyroidectomy (Thyroid Removal)

The thyroid is the gland located in your neck which has to do with metabolism. *Metabolism* is the use of food supplies in your body. The thyroid gland is responsible for how fast the food is broken down and used. When the thyroid is **overactive** it is called **hyper**thyroidism. It is called **hypo**thyroidism when the thyroid is **underactive**. When the thyroid does not get enough iodine in the diet it becomes enlarged and is called a goiter. The thyroid gland lies on both sides of your thyroid cartilage (adam's apple). Removal of this gland is one form of treatment when the gland has become too large, overactive, or has developed cancer (a tumor).

PROCEDURE

The removal of the thyroid gland is done by a surgical procedure (an operation). The gland is removed through an *incision* (cut by the surgeon) in the neck. Different procedures are used depending on what your caregiver feels is wrong. This will be discussed with you. Procedures used are:

- **Total thyroidectomy:** The total thyroid gland is removed while trying to leave the other important tissues and nerves that are located near the thyroid alone.
- **Subtotal thyroidectomy:** The thyroid gland is partially removed. This partial removal leaves behind some working thyroid tissue. The tissue left behind may be enough to provide thyroid hormone for the rest of your life. Replacement **may not** be required.

COMPLICATIONS

- **Hypo**thyroidism: Because it cannot be judged how much thyroid tissue is to be left behind, there is most often not enough thyroid tissue to supply the necessary amount of thyroid hormone. When this happens it is necessary to take **replacement hormone. This will be necessary for the rest of your life.**
- Hypoparathyroidism: The parathyroid glands are located behind the thyroid gland and are close to the thyroid. When a total thyroidectomy is done it is possible to remove the parathyroid glands along with the thyroid tissue. The tissues are often difficult to tell apart. These glands are responsible for calcium metabolism. This maintains calcium levels in the body. When these glands are damaged or removed, the calcium in the blood becomes low and the nerves in the body become irritable. This can result in spasm of the muscles. Medications are available to treat this.
- Infection. This can usually be treated with *antibiotics.* These are medications that kill germs.
- Damage to the nerves that go to the voice box. The least amount of damage causes hoarseness. The worst case can cause complete loss of voice. This would happen when both nerves are damaged.
- Bleeding after surgery is a complication of almost all surgeries. It is of greater concern in the neck because a moderate amount of blood building up here cuts off breathing. This becomes an emergency procedure to stop it and restore the breathing. The neck also is a much more *vascular* (vessel filled) area than many other areas of the body.
- Recurrence of thyroid cancer may happen with the very best of surgery and follow up treatment. Sometimes small cancer cells that cannot be seen with the naked eye have already spread at the time of surgery. Other treatment is available. This treatment may be radiation, medications, or a combination of both.

Remember, **all surgeries, regardless of how perfectly done, are not one hundred percent successful** with one hundred percent perfect results. Your surgeon is doing everything to the best of their ability to help ensure a great outcome.

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