Thyroidectomy (for Nodule)

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is the thyroid gland?

The thyroid gland is a structure in your neck that produces a hormone called thyroxine, which regulates your body's metabolism.

Your thyroid gland has become abnormal and a lump (nodule) has developed.

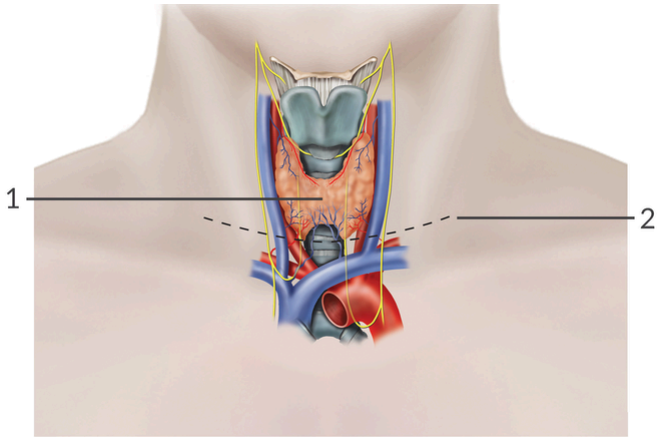
What are the benefits of surgery?

You will no longer have the lump in your thyroid gland. If the lump is getting larger, surgery may help to prevent an unsightly appearance and should improve any symptoms caused by the swelling.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Surgery is recommended so that your doctor can be sure about what is causing the lump. There is no sure way of knowing the cause of the lump without surgery, and so it would be a risk to leave it untreated in case it is a cancer.

A thyroidectomy



 Illustrator: www.medical-artist.com

1. Thyroid
2. Cut

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

The lump may stay the same size or it could continue to grow and become more noticeable. It may affect your breathing or swallowing, and there is a risk that you will develop serious complications.

If the lump is caused by a cancer, there is a risk that the cancer will spread to other parts of your body.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes about an hour.

Your surgeon will make a cut on your neck in the line of one of your skin creases.

Your surgeon will remove part, or all, of the thyroid gland.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to reduce the risk of complications.

Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you. Some risks are higher if you are older, obese, you are a smoker or have other health problems. These health problems include diabetes, heart disease or lung disease.

Some complications can be serious and in rare cases can even cause death.

General complications of any operation

- Infection of the surgical site (wound).
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication.
- Blood clot in your leg (deep-vein thrombosis – DVT).
- Blood clot in your lung (pulmonary embolus), if a blood clot moves through your bloodstream to your lungs.
- Chest infection. Your risk will be lower if you have stopped smoking and you are free of Covid-19 (coronavirus) symptoms for at least 7 weeks before the operation.

Specific complications of this operation

- Bleeding during or after the operation. Bleeding in your wound can be serious if it leads to swelling in your windpipe (trachea).
- Change in your voice. Slight, temporary changes are common. In some cases the changes may be permanent.

- Drop in calcium levels in your blood. You may need long-term calcium supplements.
- Thyroid hormone levels in your blood may drop, particularly if most of the thyroid has been removed. You may need replacement treatment with thyroxine tablets and your blood levels will be monitored for life. The risk of needing long-term thyroxine treatment is lower if only half of the thyroid is removed, and you have never had surgery to the other half.
- Breathing difficulties, if there is damage to nerves on both sides of your neck, serious swelling around your neck or if your windpipe collapses. You may need a tracheostomy to place a breathing tube in your windpipe.
- Aspiration problems. This can happen if one of the nerves in your neck that supply your voice box is damaged.

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain.
- Unsightly scarring of your skin.

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after 1 to 2 days.

You should be able to return to work and normal activities after about 2 weeks, depending on how much surgery you need and your type of work.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a full recovery and can return to normal activities.

The healthcare team will usually arrange an appointment for you within 4 weeks. Your surgeon will tell you the results and discuss with you any treatment or follow-up you need.

Summary

A thyroid lump can cause an unsightly appearance, discomfort or a change in your voice, or affect your breathing or swallowing. A thyroidectomy to remove the lump should improve your symptoms and help find out what is causing the lump.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

Reviewer

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Illustrator