

# Thyroidectomy (for Goitre)

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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 enlarged (thyroid goitre). This can cause an unsightly appearance, changes in your voice or a feeling of pressure in the neck, or affect your breathing or swallowing.

## What are the benefits of surgery?

Removing the gland will improve the appearance of your neck. It will also prevent or cure breathing or swallowing difficulties and improve any other symptoms caused by the enlarged gland.

## Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Surgery is not essential unless your symptoms are severe. It may be possible to treat your condition with medication such as thyroxine tablets.

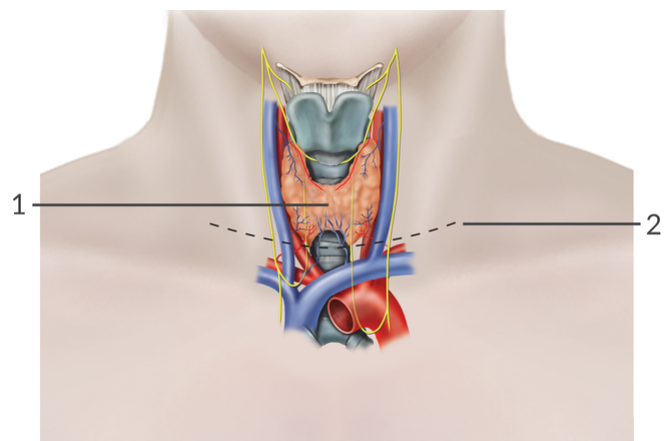
You can decide not to have the swelling treated.

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

The gland may stay the same size or it could continue to grow.

It may be seriously affect your breathing or swallowing and any other symptoms may get worse.

## A thyroidectomy



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1. Thyroid
2. Cut

## What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes 90 minutes to 2 hours.

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

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

## How can I prepare myself for the operation?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Speak to the healthcare team about any vaccinations you might need to reduce your risk of serious illness while you recover. When you come into hospital, practise hand washing and wear a face covering when asked.

## 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.
- 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, or all, of the thyroid has been removed. 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.
- Aspiration problems, where food enters your windpipe instead of your oesophagus (gullet) when you swallow, making you cough.

## 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 a few weeks. Your surgeon will tell you the results and discuss with you any treatment or follow-up you need.

## Summary

Thyroid goitre can cause an unsightly appearance, changes in your voice or a feeling of pressure in the neck, or affect your breathing or swallowing. A thyroidectomy to remove the thyroid gland is sometimes recommended to treat this condition.

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**

Roger Berry (MBBS, FRACS)

## **Illustrator**

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