

# Post-Operative Instructions for Parathyroid Surgery

- Questions: call the office on [\(03\) 9347-8786](tel:(03)9347-8786)
- After hours emergency: A/Professor Miller's mobile - emergency only please

Below are general instructions for patients who have had thyroid or parathyroid surgery. Since individual circumstances may vary, it is important that you discuss your individual post operative care with us.

## Monitoring Your Progress

You should feel improvement every day after surgery. If you have any questions regarding your progress, call our office. You should make a follow up appointment approximately 1-2 weeks after your surgery.

## Incision

Your incision is covered with a waterproof protective dressing. You can shower and wash your hair as usual, but do not soak or scrub the dressing. After showering, pat dry. Your dressing will be removed at your first postoperative visit. If you experience itching once the dressing is off, you may apply lotion to the scar. I recommend keeping Micropore tape on the scar (available at any pharmacy) for about 6 weeks. It will help the scar fade more quickly. Change it every ~5-7 days.

In patients prone to keloids, I use skin glue rather than sutures. The glue eventually flakes off by itself.

You might notice bruising around your incision or upper chest and slight swelling behind the scar when you are upright. In addition, the scar may become pink and hard. This hardening will peak at about 3 weeks and may result in some neck tightness or difficulty swallowing, which will disappear over the next 3 to 4 months. You will also notice some numbness of the skin of your neck. This will gradually improve over time.

## Pain

The main complaint following parathyroid surgery is discomfort with swallowing. Some people experience a dull ache, while others feel a sharp pain. This should not keep you from eating anything you want, but the pain can be annoying for a day or two. Nurofen and/ or Panadol is generally enough to control this pain. Some people prefer Panadeine, but in general, stronger medications are not necessary for long. You may feel like you have phlegm in your throat. This is usually because there was a tube in your windpipe while you were asleep that caused irritation that you perceive as phlegm. You will notice that if you cough, very little phlegm will come up. This should clear up in 4 to 5 days.

Beginning five days after the operation, massage the scar for five minutes when you wake up, five minutes in the middle of the day, and another five minutes when you go to bed. There is good evidence that wound massage reduces pain and improves healing. Turn your head and roll your shoulders several times daily to avoid stiffness.

## **Voice Changes**

Your voice may go through some temporary changes with fluctuations in volume and clarity (hoarseness). Temporary changes are quite common. Generally, it will be better in the mornings and "tire" toward the end of the day. This can last for variable periods of time, but should clear in 4-6 months at most. There is a small (1/100) risk of permanent hoarseness. There is a higher chance your singing voice will be affected.

## **Hypocalcemia and Bone Health**

Your bones have been starved of calcium during the time you have had hyperparathyroidism, and will now have the chance to grow strong again. After successful parathyroid surgery, I recommend plenty of dietary calcium. If you do not take at least three daily servings of calcium-rich foods, you may prefer to take Caltrate Plus twice a day (available at any chemist) to promote healthy bones. In addition to these supplements, an exercise routine using weights is also recommended. Your vitamin D should be kept  $>75$  to enable your intestine to absorb the calcium in your diet.

In a small number of patients who have parathyroid surgery, the remaining parathyroid glands have become lazy, and do not function properly immediately after surgery. It is very rare after the mini-surgery, but about 5% if you need both sides of the neck explored. This is usually temporary and causes the blood calcium level to drop below normal (hypocalcaemia). Symptoms of hypocalcaemia include numbness and tingling in your hands, soles of your feet and around your lips. Some patients experience a "crawling" sensation in the skin, muscle cramps or headaches. These symptoms appear between 24 and 48 hours after surgery. It is rare for them to appear after 72 hours.

Hypocalcaemia is treated with extra calcium tablets. Depending on the extent of your surgery, and your blood results just after, I might send you home with calcium (big white pills) and calcitriol (little orange/red pills), which will usually be temporary. If you develop tingling in the fingertips, toes, or lips, your calcium may be low. Take two extra caltrate tablets (there is no danger in taking it, even if you do not need it) The symptoms of tingling/numbness should improve within 30-45 minutes of taking the tablets. If the symptoms persist, you should take two more tablets and wait another 45 minutes. If they still persist after 3 extra doses, call my office in working hours, or after hours report to your nearest emergency room to have your blood calcium checked.

Please keep us informed, and keep a record of the amount required. The hypocalcaemia usually disappears over a few weeks to months. In some cases, the parathyroid glands do not recover. If that happens, you will need to continue taking calcium tablets permanently, but typically not as

many tablets as you needed in the first few weeks. This is very uncommon after parathyroid surgery.

**CONTACT MY OFFICE for any of the following symptoms:**

- Fever >38.3 or chills
- Increasing pain or redness around incision
- Difficulty breathing
- Tingling around the lips or fingertips not relieved by calcium tablets
- Severe muscle cramps

**AN IMPORTANT WORD ABOUT THE COSTS OF TREATMENT**

Insurance rebates have not kept pace with the cost of running a medical practice. As a consequence, there will be a gap to pay for the surgical fee and for the anaesthetist. Your insurance company might also charge you an excess for a hospital admission. We will advise you about expected out-of-pocket costs not covered by insurance. If these costs represent an undue hardship for you, please discuss them with us.

**ASK YOUR DOCTOR**

We are here to help you. If you have any questions, please ask. It is often helpful to bring a family member with you to a consultation, or to write questions down so you won't forget them.