

Discharge Instructions After Surgery for Cancer of the Thyroid



You've been diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Your thyroid gland makes hormones that control your metabolism, heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature.

The most common treatment for thyroid cancer is surgery to take out some or all of the thyroid gland (thyroidectomy). If your thyroid gland is gone, you'll need to take thyroid medicine for the rest of your life. Even if your surgeon left some of your thyroid in place, you may need to take thyroid hormone. This is to make sure you have enough in your body. Thyroid hormones can also help decrease the risk of the cancer coming back.

This sheet can help you know how to take care of yourself after surgery. Follow all instructions your healthcare team gives you. Ask questions if you have concerns or need more information.

Home care

At home:

- Don't get your incision site wet for a few days after your surgery. When you wash, use soap and water to clean the incision. Don't scrub.
- Don't do any strenuous activities for 3 to 5 weeks after surgery. Listen to your body. If an activity causes pain, stop.
- Limit your activity to short walks. Slowly increase your pace and distance as you feel able.
- Rest when you are tired. Don't worry if you are very tired (fatigued). Fatigue and weakness are normal for a few weeks. This will get better over time.
- Ask your healthcare provider when you can expect to return to work and your normal activities.
- Go back to your regular diet as you feel able. Try to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.
- Keep a card in your wallet that lists the following:
 - Your name and contact information
 - Your healthcare provider's name and contact information
 - Your important medical history
 - The brand name and dose of your thyroid medicine and any other medicines you are taking

Medicine

Take your thyroid hormone medicine exactly as directed. Follow these tips:

- Keep your pills in a container that's labeled with the days of the week. This will help you remember if you've taken your medicine each day.
- Take your medicine with a liquid like water. Don't take it with soy milk or grapefruit juice. These change the way your body absorbs thyroid hormone. To work, the pill must make it to your stomach and not dissolve in your throat.
- Try to take your thyroid medicine at about the same time every day and on an empty stomach, at least 30 to 60 minutes before other foods or medicines. This will help you absorb the medicine and keep a steady amount of thyroid hormone in your system.
- Don't stop your thyroid medicine on your own.

- When taking your thyroid medicine:
 - Wait 4 hours before or after eating or drinking anything that contains soy.
 - Wait 4 hours before or after taking iron supplements, antacids that contain either calcium or aluminum hydroxide, or calcium supplements.
 - Wait 4 hours before or after taking medicines that lower your cholesterol.

Tips for healthcare provider visits

- During your routine visits, tell your healthcare provider about any signs of too much thyroid hormone (hyperthyroidism). These include:
 - Restlessness, nervousness
 - Quick weight loss
 - Sweating
 - Heart palpitations, faster heartbeat, or chest pain
 - Trouble sleeping
 - Shortness of breath
 - Pooping more often than normal
 - Menstrual period stops
 - Hair loss
- During your routine visits, tell your provider about any signs of too little thyroid hormone (hypothyroidism). These include:
 - Fatigue or sluggishness
 - Puffy hands, face, or feet
 - Hoarseness
 - Muscle pain
 - Slow pulse (less than 60 beats per minute)
 - Weakness
 - Weight gain
 - Feeling cold often
 - Constipation

Follow-up

It is important to go to follow-up appointments after surgery:

- Make a follow-up appointment as directed.
- Make and keep appointments to see your healthcare provider and get blood tests. Your thyroid hormone levels will need to be watched for the rest of your life.

- Let your healthcare provider know if you've been prescribed any new medicine. Some medicines can change how well your thyroid hormone dose works.
- Know what problems you should watch for after thyroid surgery. Know how to get help any time, including after office hours and on weekends and holidays.

When to call your healthcare provider

Talk with your healthcare provider about the symptoms you should watch for. Call your provider if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38°C) or higher, or as advised by your provider
- Chills
- Swelling or bleeding at the incision
- Incision that opens, or its edges pull apart
- Trouble eating or swallowing
- Pain that's getting worse
- Sore throat that lasts longer than 3 weeks
- Tingling or cramps in your hands, feet, or lips
- Lump in your neck
- Pain, redness, swelling, or warmth in an arm or leg

Call 911

Call **911** right away if you have:

- Choking
- Coughing
- Trouble breathing

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