

Patient Information

Parathyroidectomy

Removal of the parathyroid gland

Ears, Nose and Throat Department



What is a parathyroidectomy?

A parathyroidectomy is a surgical procedure (operation) to remove one or more of the parathyroid glands.

What are the parathyroid glands?

Most people have four parathyroid glands in the neck. These help to control the level of calcium in the blood.

Over-activity of parathyroid glands can lead to too much calcium in the blood causing:

- Weakening of bones (osteoporosis)
- muscle weakness
- kidney stones
- fatigue (tiredness)
- stomach ulcers
- depression

If the calcium level is not well controlled:

- the heart rate can slow down or beat too rapidly
- muscles can go into spasm (tetany)
- you can become confused and even go into a coma

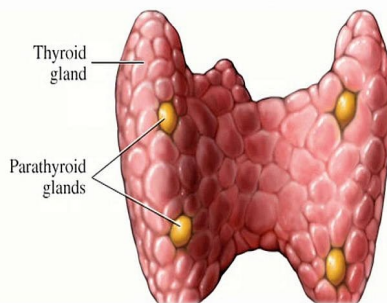


Diagram showing the thyroid and parathyroid glands

Benefits of having the parathyroidectomy

The benefits of having the procedure is to allow for investigations to get a diagnosis, or to treat some conditions already diagnosed, such as:

- **Diagnostic investigations, i.e. for parathyroid cancer or parathyroid hyperplasia** - removal of one or more glands allows the tissue to be analysed in the laboratory
- **To treat hypercalcemia** - this is when the level of calcium in the blood is abnormally high due to overactive parathyroid glands
- **To remove adenomas** - tumours which are commonly benign and rarely turn into cancer

What does the surgery involve?

The operation is carried out under general anaesthetic, which means that you will be asleep.

Once you're asleep, a horizontal incision (cut) is made in one of your skin creases in the neck and some or all of the parathyroid glands are removed. A surgical drain may be inserted to allow any blood to drain. Your voice box will be monitored during the operation to avoid or minimise the damage to your voice. The incision is then glued or sutured (stitched).

The operation normally takes about 1 hour.

What are the potential risks?

Bleeding - As with any operation, there may be some bleeding from the site of operation. This may occur during or after surgery. You will have bruising and occasionally a haematoma (bleeding under the skin). Sometimes this might need further surgery or a blood transfusion.

Pain - we will give you medication to control the pain. It is important you take your painkillers as instructed so you can start moving around and cough freely.

Infection - any break in the skin can be at risk of infection. We will advise you to reduce the risk of infection by hand washing and keeping your wound clean and dry. If you do have infection it may require treatment with antibiotics.

Hoarseness of voice - this usually settles over a few weeks, however, in a very small number of patients, this may become permanent.

Damage to the laryngeal nerve - this nerve supplies the vocal cords. If a nerve is damaged during the operation, the result may be hoarseness of voice. This may be temporary or permanent. The chance of the nerve being damaged is 1-2%. If the superior laryngeal nerve is injured, there may be difficulty in altering the pitch of your voice. This seldom is permanent.

Low blood calcium - once the overactive parathyroid gland has been removed, the other glands may take a few days before returning to normal activity. In addition, your bones may absorb more calcium from your blood (a condition called “hungry bones syndrome”). For these reasons your calcium level can drop too much and this could cause tingling in you lips and fingers. This can be treated with calcium supplements.

What am I to expect after the operation?

You will be able to carry out your normal activities once you get home although you may feel a little bit tired for couple of days. You will be able to eat and drink normally. If you feel tingling or spasms in you fingers and toes, please contact your GP as this can be sign that there is not enough calcium in your blood.

Does it hurt?

If you have pain and discomfort, this can usually be controlled with simple painkillers.

Time in hospital

Usually conducted as an overnight stay in hospital.

Will the scar be very obvious?

The scar is on the front of the neck, but this often settles to become a barely noticeable white line.

Time off work

Two weeks is the required time off work to help you recover well. A sick/fit note will be provided before discharge.

Post-operative care and advice

Important - After being discharged home, if you experience numbness and tingling around your mouth after 24 - 48 hours, you should seek medical attention by attending the nearest Emergency Department.

- You will need to keep the wound clean and dry
- You will be monitored by a doctor to check the calcium levels in your blood
- Avoid smoky, dry, or dusty atmospheres
- You should generally restrict vigorous activities or activities which involve turning the head suddenly, such as driving and heavy lifting, for 2-6 weeks after surgery

Follow-up appointment

You will be reviewed by your surgeon usually in the outpatient department 2 weeks after your surgery.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

There may be non-surgical options for treatment depending on your diagnosis. You should discuss this with your consultant.

What if I have any questions?

If you have any concerns or questions, please speak to a member of the nursing team.

Please use this space to write down any notes or questions you may wish to ask:

Useful Telephone Numbers

- ENT Department, Lister Hospital
☎ 01438 314333, Ext. 5113 / 4118
- ENT Admission Office (waiting list)
☎ 01438 286836 or 01438 286835
- ENT Nurse Specialist (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)
☎ 01438 314333, bleep 1028
Mobile: 0778 534 3359 or 0787 639 0290

In an emergency, dial 999 and request an ambulance or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
☎ 111

Useful ENT website: www.entuk.org

www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk

You can request this information in a different format or another language.