



NECK SURGERY

A neck surgery (dissection) is surgery to remove all or some of the lymph nodes and surrounding tissue from the neck. Lymph nodes are small, round, or bean-shaped glands that act as filters and remove germs from your body, help fight infection, and trap cancer cells. This surgery is most often done to treat cancer of the head and neck.

The area may also be swollen, and you may have a stiff neck. For most people, the swelling starts to slowly go away one week after surgery. You may have numbness in your neck and ear. Your lower lip or shoulder may feel weak. For most people, these problems go away in 6 to 12 months, but sometimes these problems can be permanent. Physical therapy may be needed for a time after surgery. You may always feel a little numb, stiff, or weak in some areas.

If a neck muscle was removed, your neck might look flatter or thinner.

If you have cancer, you may still need other treatment after surgery, such as radiation or chemotherapy.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover. But each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to get better as quickly as possible.

How can you care for yourself at home?

Activity

- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover. When you lie down, put 2 or 3 pillows under your upper back and shoulders so that your neck and head are supported.
- Try to walk each day. Start by walking a little more than you did the day before. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk. Walking boosts blood flow and helps prevent pneumonia, blood clots, and constipation.
- Avoid strenuous physical activity, lifting heavy objects, and airplane travel for 3 weeks after surgery or until your doctor says it is okay.
- You can drive again when you can move your neck as needed and you are off narcotic pain medication.
- You will be able to take showers, typically 48 hours after surgery.
- You will have a drain by your incision. You will be instructed on how to take care of this after surgery.

Diet

- If it is painful to swallow, start out with cold drinks, popsicles, and ice cream. Next, try soft foods like pudding, yogurt, canned or cooked fruit, scrambled eggs, and mashed potatoes.



- You may notice that your bowel movements are not regular right after your surgery. This is common. Try to avoid constipation and straining with bowel movements. You may want to take a fiber supplement every day. If you have not had a bowel movement after a couple of days, ask your doctor about taking a mild laxative.

Medicines

- You can start back all medications after surgery. If you take blood thinners, please don't restart these until instructed.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
 - Take Motrin 600 mg every 6 hours and Tylenol 1000 mg every 6 hours.
 - You will have a narcotic pain medication you can take for severe pain.

Incision care

- After the first 24 to 48 hours, wash around the incision with clean, soapy water 2 times a day. Don't use hydrogen peroxide or alcohol, which can slow healing.
- You may have a drain near your incision. If you do, empty and write down the amount in the drain three times a day. This will help your doctor know when to take your drain out.

Exercise

- If you have trouble with shoulder and arm strength and movement, you may need physical therapy. Your doctor or physical therapist will help you with this.

Call the office if

- You have loose stitches, or your incision comes open.
- You have signs of infection, such as:
 - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
 - Red streaks leading from the incision.
 - Pus draining from the incision.
 - A fever.
- Bleeding from your incision soaks through your bandages.