

After thyroid surgery

Dear patient,

You have stood the operation of your thyroid and are in postoperative recovery. Some things will probably change in the future, for example the intake of thyroid tablets on a daily base, other things will have to be considered only short-term. This leaflet should provide some information for the time after your hospital discharge.

When am I allowed to take a shower / take a bath?

Basically, you may take a shower already during your hospitalization. The dressing material is water-repellent. In case of insertion of drainages, it will be possible to take a shower after their removal. After suture removal you may take a shower without the wound dressing. When rinsing your hair, do not overstretch your head in order to avoid too much traction on the scar. Going swimming as well as visiting the sauna should be avoided for another two weeks after removal of the suture materials.

How long do I have to wait before I can get exercise again?

Basically, unrestricted physical activity will be possible two weeks after discharge from the hospital. Some light endurance training (walking, jogging, bicycle riding) may even be started earlier. Until the check-up of your thyroid values – approx. four weeks after surgery – you should avoid to surpass your own limit in exercising. Unlike in case of stomach surgery there are no weight restrictions after thyroid surgery during lifting procedures.

What do you have to observe when taking the thyroid tablet?

Thyroid hormones are vital for the human body. If the thyroid gland was completely removed, your body depends on the regular intake of thyroid hormones in the future. Also, after the thyroid gland was only partly removed, frequently an intake of thyroid hormones or iodine will be necessary, since otherwise there will be an increased risk of nodes in the remainder of the thyroid gland, which, then again, may result in another surgery.

When taking the thyroid hormones please be aware that the active substance is present in the tablet in the millionth part of a gram only. For its adequate ingestion, the tablet is to be swallowed with some water on an empty stomach in the morning. An interval of at least 20 minutes should elapse between the intake of the tablet and food intake. If you have forgotten to take the tablet once, this is not very dramatic. The level of thyroid hormone in the blood changes only very slowly. In such a case, just continue the regular intake on the next day. Do not double the dosage.

If the thyroid tablet was not taken for a period of several days or even weeks, hypothyroidism (under-active thyroid) will be caused in the long run, with all its consequences (fatigue, loss of energy, increase in weight, etc.). The thyroid function should be checked by your endocrinologist or physician approx. four to six weeks after surgery. This requires only some blood sampling. In rare cases, the dosage of thyroid hormone will have to be adjusted.

When may I go on vacation again?

Air travel will be possible after about a week after thyroid surgery, car or train rides of longer duration even earlier. In total, ensure that you get enough breaks and sufficient physical activity. Fresh scars are very sensitive to UV-rays for approx. three months after the operation so that sunburn must be avoided. If necessary, you may use a scarf as a protection in direct sunlight. No solarium visits during that period.

What can I do to achieve a good cosmetic result regarding the scar?

Frequently, scar healing will have been completed after a few months, in some cases, however, it may take up to one year. Special scar care with a scar cream is not absolutely required, basically, normal skincare (e.g. with Bepanthen® ointment) will be enough. You may start this about one week after suture removal. Some patients report of positive experience with scar cream, however, there is no scientific evidence for this. Your pharmacist will be able to give you further information. Do not apply cosmetic products on the scar for the first three months.

Scar healing is at its most intensive between the 10th and 20th day after surgery. Then a noticeable solidification of the scar or swelling above the incision may take place. This is entirely a normal and benign process, the scar may also stay solid for up to four to six weeks. During this period, also a visible movement of the skin scar during swallowing may occur. Please do not hesitate to contact us should uncertainties arise regarding your individual scar healing.

It is essential for you to have your lab values regularly checked after the thyroid operation, this means after approx. four to six weeks, when adjustment may be made. An ultrasound scan of the result of the surgery will be done approximately six months after the operation. Should you have received a calcium medication after the operation these will have to be monitored closely (e.g. once or twice a week). Thus the dose may be reduced quicker.

We hope that these guidelines helped answering most of your question. It can, however, never be a replacement for a personal discussion. Please do not hesitate to contact us in case of any questions. Should you have any queries please see us in our hospital, also after you were discharged.

Best wishes for your recovery,



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Head Physician