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PARATHYROID SURGERY

What are the parathyroid glands?

The parathyroid glands are small pea-sized glands in the neck that regulate the body's calcium levels. There are four glands in total with two glands on each side of the neck. They are located just beneath the thyroid gland in the lower part of the neck.

Why is parathyroid surgery necessary?

If one or more parathyroid glands are overactive, then the calcium level in the blood will be too high. This is called hyperparathyroidism. This is often found with routine blood testing that is done for other reasons. When the parathyroid hormone is abnormally high, this can result in calcium being depleted from the bones which can result in arthritis, osteopenia, or osteoporosis. When too much calcium is present in the blood, this can result in calcium being deposited into the urine, which can cause kidney stones. Other symptoms of high blood calcium include GI symptoms (nausea, vomiting, constipation), neurological symptoms (depression, fatigue, weakness), cardiovascular (high blood pressure, slow heart rate, enlarged heart, abnormal heart rhythms). ***However, most patients with hyperparathyroidism do not have any symptoms.*** The absence of symptoms does not mean that treatment is not needed.

What does the surgery involve?

The surgery is performed in the operating room under general anesthesia. You must not eat or drink anything after midnight prior to your surgery. You should take all of your regularly scheduled medications unless told otherwise by your physician. Once you are asleep under anesthesia, the surgeon will make a small incision on the lower neck. The underlying thyroid gland is identified and the parathyroid glands are inspected. The pre-operative imaging studies help to determine which glands to check first. Once the enlarged gland is identified, it is surgically removed and sent to the pathologist for analysis. There will also be two or more intra-operative blood tests of the parathyroid hormone levels. We use the blood tests to confirm that the parathyroid function returns to normal after removal of the enlarged gland. The incision is closed and a small drain is left in place. Patients generally stay overnight one night in the hospital and are ready to go home the next day.

What are the risks of surgery?



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Parathyroid surgery is generally very safe and effective. There are rare instances of bleeding, infection, or failure to cure that would require re-operation. There are rare instances of damage to nerves that would cause vocal cord weakness and hoarseness.

Texas law requires that we disclose the following risks associated with parathyroid surgery: (1) Acute airway obstruction requiring temporary tracheostomy (creation of hole in neck to breathe). (2) Injury to nerves resulting in hoarseness or impairment of speech. (3) Low blood calcium levels that require extensive medication to avoid serious degenerative conditions, such as cataracts, brittle bones, muscle weakness, and muscle irritability. (4) Persistent high calcium level with need for additional treatment/surgery.

What should I expect after surgery?

There will be a small drain in place next to the incision for 1-3 days after the surgery. This drain will be removed in the hospital or in the physician's office. There will be a mild to moderate amount of pain around the incision for 1-2 weeks after surgery. You will be given prescription pain medication that should easily control the pain. Most patients can return to work in 3-5 days. You should avoid strenuous exercise or lifting greater than 15 pounds for two weeks after surgery. You should avoid traveling for two weeks after surgery. You may eat regular food the day after surgery, but softer foods may be easier to swallow due to residual soreness in the neck.

Please notify Dr. Thomason immediately if you have any of the following problems:

- Fever > 101 deg F
- Vomiting that lasts more than four hours
- Swelling at the incision
- Inability to swallow
- Numbness or tingling around lips or hands
- Any concerns that are not addressed on these pages

Emergencies will be treated at Medical City Las Colinas located at 6800 N. MacArthur Blvd Irving, Texas (Southeast corner of MacArthur and Highway 161)