

## POSTOPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR THYROID OR PARATHYROID SURGERY

### ACTIVITY:

- Walking around the house, climbing stairs, riding in a car or doing light office work is fine as soon as you feel able.
- It may not be comfortable to do hard physical activity or sports (e.g., swimming, skiing, tennis, weight lifting or contact sports) for several weeks.
- You can usually go back to a full-time work schedule in one week. It may take longer to return to heavy physical or other demanding work.
- Sexual activity is safe as soon as you are comfortable.
- **Do not** drive a car until you can turn your neck from side to side, which may take one week.
- **Do not** drive while you are taking pain medicines.

### DIET:

- You may have temporary throat discomfort or difficulty swallowing. This is due to the surgery around your larynx (voice box) and esophagus (swallowing tube).
- Drink and eat foods that you can swallow easily at first (e.g., juice, soup, gelatin, apple sauce, scrambled eggs or mashed potatoes).
- You may be able to return to your usual diet in a couple of days.
- If you had an operation for thyroid cancer, you might need to prepare for radioiodine scanning and treatment. Eat a special diet with no iodine.
- **Do not** eat iodized salt, sushi, seaweed, dairy products, commercial white bread, medications or vitamins that have iodine in them.
- If you had parathyroid surgery, you might need more calcium in your diet.
- If you have lactose intolerance, you may need calcium pills.

### INCISION CARE:

- Place bacitracin or Neosporin ointment on the incision twice a day for five days. After that, you may get your neck wet.
- You may get the incision wet two days after surgery.
- Pat the incision dry. **Do not** scrub with soap or a washcloth for the first 10 days.
- If you have stitches that a physician needs to remove, they will remove them one week after surgery.
- Mild swelling at the incision site will go away in four to six weeks. The pink line will slowly fade to white during the next 6 to 12 months.
- Avoid having too much sun or getting sunburns while the incision is healing. Use a sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher), or wear a scarf for protection.
- You may begin to use a moisturizing cream along the incision after one week.

### COMMON PROBLEMS:

- Numbness of the skin under the chin or above the incision is normal and should go away in a few weeks.
- You may feel a lump or pressure-in-your-throat sensation when swallowing for a few days.
- Your incision may feel itchy while it heals. Avoid rubbing or scratching if possible.
- You may feel neck stiffness, tightness, a pulling feeling, mild aching, chest discomfort, headache, ear pain or congestion.

Take a mild pain medicine, such as Tylenol or Advil. Put heat on the area using a hot water bottle, heating pad or warm shower.

- Your voice may be hoarse or weak. Pitch or tone may change. You may have difficulty singing. This situation usually goes back to normal over six weeks to six months.
- After surgery, you may notice a change in your mood, emotional ups and downs, depression, irritability or fatigue, and weakness. These changes in your personality will get better as time passes.

#### **HORMONES AND MEDICATIONS:**

- You may have to take Synthroid® or Levoxyl when you go home. These are identical to the hormone made by the thyroid.
- Take the medication as instructed.
- If you are taking calcium pills (Os-Cal or Tums) or vitamin D (Rocaltrol or Calcitriol), make sure you take your medicine exactly as directed.
- If you have parathyroid surgery, you may need to eat a high calcium diet or take calcium pills for a few weeks. You may need a blood test at your follow-up visit.

#### **CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF:**

- Your temperature is greater than 101F (or 38.3C).
- You have continued drainage from the incision, constant numbness in your fingers, repeated choking, difficulty breathing, severe pain or increasing swelling or redness.

#### **FOLLOW-UP:**

- If you do not have an appointment for a follow-up visit, call your doctor's office to set up an appointment for approximately one week after surgery.
- In case of emergencies, call your doctor's office or go to the emergency room.