

Understanding Hemithyroidectomy

- **What it is:** A hemithyroidectomy is a surgical procedure where half of your thyroid gland is removed. The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland located in the front of your neck, producing hormones that regulate vital body functions.
- **Reasons for the Procedure:** Your doctor may recommend a hemithyroidectomy if you have:
 - **Thyroid Nodule:** A concerning or symptomatic growth on one side of the thyroid.
 - **Hyperthyroidism (Overactive Thyroid):** When one side of your thyroid produces too much thyroid hormone.
 - **Goitre:** An enlarged thyroid gland on one side causing pressure symptoms.
 - **Suspicion of Thyroid Cancer:** In cases where cancer is limited to one side of the thyroid.

Potential Benefits of Hemithyroidectomy

- **Addressing Thyroid Issues:** Resolves concerns associated with thyroid nodules, one-sided hyperthyroidism, and in some cases, thyroid cancer.
- **Relief of Pressure Symptoms:** Reduces discomfort if you have an enlarged thyroid gland.

Important Considerations

- **Risks of Surgery:** Like any surgery, a hemithyroidectomy has potential risks. It's crucial to discuss these thoroughly with your surgeon. These include:
 - **General Risks:**
 - Bleeding
 - Infection
 - **Specific Risks:**
 - **Voice Changes:** Can be temporary, or in rare cases, permanent due to nerve damage.
 - **Hypothyroidism:** The most common specific risk, requiring lifelong thyroid hormone replacement medication.
- **Alternatives:** Depending on your specific situation, there may be non-surgical alternatives to consider. These might include:

- **Active Monitoring:** Close observation of a thyroid nodule.
- **Medication:** To manage hyperthyroidism.

Preparing for the Hemithyroidectomy

- **Pre-Surgery Consultation:** You'll have a detailed discussion with your surgeon about the procedure, risks, benefits, and your specific medical history.
- **Medications:** Your doctor will advise on any adjustments to your regular medications before surgery.
- **Fasting:** You'll be asked to fast (no food or certain drinks) for a specific time before surgery.
- **Questions:** Prepare a list of questions you have – no concern is too small!

What to Expect on the Day of Surgery

- **Arrival at the Hospital:** When you arrive, you'll be asked to check in and provide any necessary information.
- **Preparation:** A nurse will review your medical history, take your vital signs, and may start an IV (intravenous line) for fluids and medication.
- **Meeting Your Team:** You'll likely meet your surgeon, anaesthetist, and other healthcare professionals involved in your care.

The Surgery

- **Operating Room:** You'll be taken to the operating room and prepared for surgery.
- **Anaesthesia:** The anaesthetist will administer general anaesthesia, so you'll be asleep during the procedure.
- **The Hemithyroidectomy Procedure:**
 - Incision
 - Removal of half the thyroid
 - Closing the incision

Recovery After Surgery

- **Post-Surgery Ward:** You'll wake up in a recovery area where nurses will monitor your condition.

- **Pain and Discomfort:** You may experience some pain, swelling, and a sore throat. Pain medication will be available.
- **Starting to Eat and Drink:** Usually, you can start drinking and eating soft foods fairly soon after surgery, depending on how quickly your swallowing ability returns.
- **Discharge from the Hospital:** Most patients go home the same day of the surgery or after staying overnight. Your healthcare team will provide detailed instructions for wound care, medications, activity restrictions, and follow-up appointments.

Where to Find Further Information

- **Your Surgeon:** Your primary source for reliable information about your specific case, procedure, and risks/benefits.
- **British Thyroid Foundation:** <https://www.btf-thyroid.org/>
- **American Thyroid Association:** <https://www.thyroid.org/>

Who to Contact with Questions

- **Surgeon:** Your primary contact for any questions related to your diagnosis, hemithyroidectomy, preparation, and immediate post-surgery concerns.
- **GP (General Practitioner):** Can answer initial questions and refer you to a specialist if needed.

Introduction

This leaflet provides guidance for your recovery after thyroid surgery. Your body needs time to heal, and everyone recovers at a different pace. This information will help you understand the recovery process, including diet, medication, wound care, exercises, and returning to your usual routine.

Diet and Swallowing

- You may initially find swallowing difficult. Start with liquids and gradually progress to soft foods like yogurt, mashed potatoes, and scrambled eggs. Avoid hard or scratchy foods until your throat feels comfortable.
- A healthy, balanced diet is important for optimal healing.
- Constipation is common after surgery. Increase your intake of high-fiber foods and drink plenty of fluids. If constipation persists, ask your pharmacist or GP for a gentle laxative.

Medication

- **Thyroid Hormone Replacement (if total thyroidectomy):** Your body no longer produces thyroid hormone. You will need to take levothyroxine every day for the rest of your life.
 - Take it on an empty stomach, at least 30 minutes before breakfast.
 - Do not take levothyroxine with calcium or zinc supplements. Wait at least four hours before taking these.
- **Calcium and Vitamin D (may be temporary):** You may receive a short course of calcium and vitamin D supplements to prevent low calcium symptoms. If you develop symptoms such as tingling, muscle cramps, or changes in mood or your skin/hair, contact your surgeon, CNS, or call 111.
- **Hemithyroidectomy Patients:** If you had part of your thyroid removed, you may not need any new medications. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

When to Go to A&E (Accident & Emergency)

Seek immediate medical attention if you experience any of the following:

- **Severe neck swelling or difficulty breathing:** This could indicate a serious complication.
- **Fever (temperature of 38°C or higher)**
- **Numbness and tingling around your mouth or in your hands and feet:** This could signal very low calcium levels.
- **Uncontrollable muscle cramps or spasms:** This can be another sign of dangerously low calcium levels.

Caring for Your Wound and Scar

- Your wound will be covered with special skin glue. You can shower with soap the day after surgery. Pat the area dry gently.
- The glue will dissolve and come away over about two weeks. Do not bathe, swim, or submerge your wound under water until your surgeon says it is safe.
- **Signs of Healing:**
 - Swelling: May be present for up to six days.
 - Rebuilding: A fresh, raised, red scar may form within a month.
 - Remodelling: Over a year, the scar will gradually fade and flatten.
- **Signs of Infection:** Contact your surgeon, CNS, GP, or call 111 if you experience:
 - Fever (temperature of 38°C or higher)
 - Increased pain, redness, or swelling around your wound
 - Discoloured or foul-smelling discharge

Neck and Shoulders Exercises

- Start gentle neck and shoulder exercises the day after surgery to promote healing and prevent stiffness (if your wound is closed internally and externally). Your care team may provide specific exercises.
- Perform them twice daily for three months, even after you regain full movement. Take painkillers beforehand if needed.

Activity

- **Get Moving:** Get up and walk around soon after surgery when it's safe.
- **Gradual Increase:** Start with light activities at home. Gradually increase duration and intensity as your body allows.

- **Weeks 1-2:** Light activities like walking. Avoid lifting anything heavier than a kettle.
- **Weeks 2-4:** Build up activities. Avoid lifting more than 5kg (11lb) or prolonged standing.
- **Weeks 4-6:** Gradually return to normal activities.

Going Back to Work

- You'll likely need about two weeks off work. This can vary depending on your recovery and the type of job you do. Discuss with your surgeon.
- Your surgeon will provide a fit note before discharge. Contact your GP if you need an extension.

Driving

- Don't drive for at least two weeks. Resume driving only when you can comfortably turn your head, control the car, and are no longer taking pain medication that makes you drowsy.

Smoking

- Smoking impairs healing. This is a great time to consider quitting for improved recovery and overall health.

We're Here For You! Your healthcare team is dedicated to supporting you throughout your recovery.