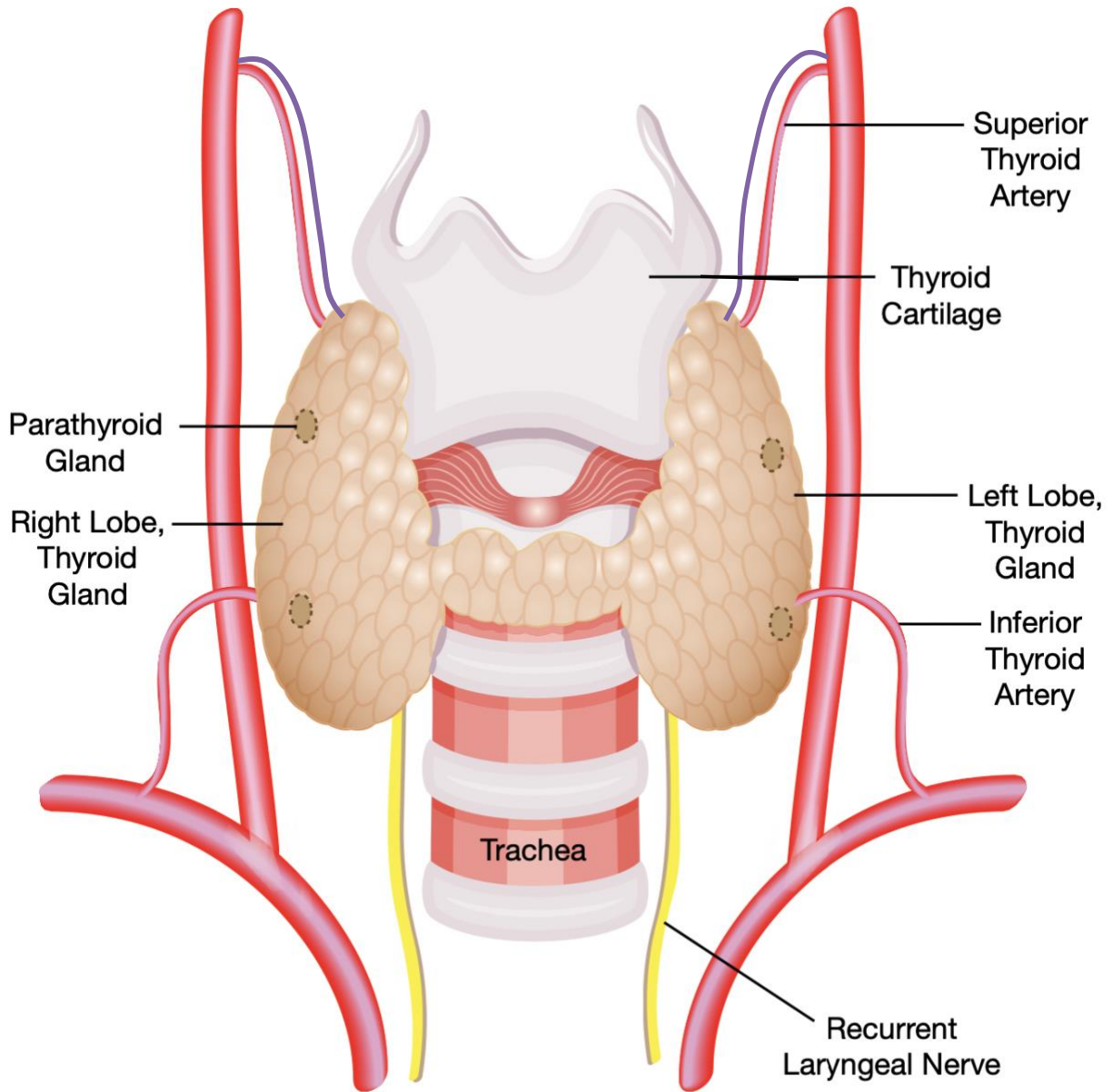


Thyroid Surgery



Thyroid and Parathyroid Glands

Thyroid Surgery

The **thyroid gland** is one of several important glands of the body that make up the endocrine system. The thyroid gland is located over the trachea (wind pipe), just below the Adams apple. The thyroid gland is made up of a left lobe and a right lobe that are connected by a bridge of thyroid tissue in the middle called the isthmus. The thyroid gland uses iodine as a building block to make thyroid hormone and thyroid hormone is important for regulating how all the cells in the body and can affect the body's metabolism, brain, heart and muscles.

There are other important glands and structures that are located next to the thyroid gland. The **parathyroid glands** are located just behind or adjacent to the thyroid gland. Sometimes a parathyroid gland may be stuck to the thyroid gland or located within the thyroid gland itself. The thyroid gland and the parathyroid glands share the same blood supply. The parathyroid glands produce parathyroid hormone (PTH) and parathyroid hormone is responsible for controlling calcium levels in your blood. The parathyroid glands are delicate and after thyroid surgery they often need time to recover before making enough PTH to keep your calcium levels normal.

The right and left **recurrent laryngeal nerves** are located behind the thyroid gland. The recurrent laryngeal nerves travel to the larynx (voice box) and control the vocal cords. The recurrent laryngeal nerves are important because they control your voice and help protect your airway. There are also superior laryngeal nerves that travel with the blood supply to the upper part of the thyroid gland. The superior laryngeal nerves control the pitch and strength of your voice. Stretching or bruising these nerves can cause hoarseness and voice changes.

Your surgeon may determine you need thyroid surgery. Thyroid surgery involves removing either half of the thyroid gland with the isthmus (**thyroid lobectomy**) or the removing the whole thyroid gland (**total thyroidectomy**).

If you have a **thyroid lobectomy**, you will likely be able to go home the same day of your surgery. Your thyroid labs will be checked 6-8 weeks after surgery to determine if your remaining thyroid gland produces enough thyroid hormone for your body. You may need to take thyroid hormone replacement (levothyroxine) even if you only have a thyroid lobectomy.

If you have a **total thyroidectomy**, you may go home the same day of your surgery or stay in the hospital overnight. When your thyroid gland is removed, you will need to take lifelong thyroid hormone replacement (levothyroxine). You will be started on levothyroxine the morning after your surgery and your thyroid levels will be checked 6-8 weeks after surgery. You will need to purchase calcium supplements before your surgery because you will need to take them after your surgery while your parathyroid glands recover. Sometimes the parathyroid glands are very stunned and you may also need to take a prescription form of activated vitamin D to help your body absorb calcium.

Recovery usually takes 1-2 weeks. Most of the postoperative soreness and discomfort will be relieved with chloraseptic throat lozenges (Cepacol) or spray to numb the throat, acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen to reduce inflammation, and an ice pack to reduce pain and swelling. Please plan to **purchase these products before your surgery**. You may be offered narcotic pain medication, though most people do not require pain pills. After surgery you can eat a regular diet. Your incision will be covered with surgical glue, and you can shower when you return home. You should not drive for a few days after surgery until your neck soreness has resolved.