Parathyroidectomy

What Is A Parathyroidectomy?

Parathyroidectomy is a surgical procedure to remove one or more parathyroid glands, which are located in your neck behind the thyroid gland. These small glands play a crucial role in regulating calcium and phosphate levels in your body by producing parathyroid hormone (PTH).

When Is A Parathyroidectomy Recommended?

The procedure is most commonly performed to treat hyperparathyroidism, a condition where one or more of the parathyroid glands become overactive, leading to excessive PTH production. This results in high calcium levels in the blood (hypercalcaemia), which can cause a range of symptoms and long-term health issues.

Parathyroidectomy is a highly effective treatment for hyperparathyroidism, helping to restore normal calcium levels and prevent long-term complications

What Are The Symptoms Of Hyperparathyroidism?

Hyperparathyroidism can affect different parts of your body, causing symptoms such as:

- **Fatigue and weakness** – feeling tired or lacking energy
- **Frequent urination and excessive thirst** – due to high calcium levels affecting kidney function
- **Bone pain and fractures** – increased calcium loss from bones can lead to osteoporosis and fractures
- **Kidney stones** – high calcium levels can cause stone formation in the kidneys
- **Digestive issues** – including nausea, abdominal pain, and constipation
- **Depression or anxiety** – changes in mood and mental well-being
- **Memory problems and difficulty concentrating** – sometimes referred to as “brain fog”

If left untreated, hyperparathyroidism can lead to serious complications, including kidney damage and severe

bone loss.

How Is Parathyroidectomy Performed?

Parathyroidectomy is the main treatment for primary hyperparathyroidism and is performed under general anaesthesia, meaning you will be completely asleep during the procedure.

Pre-Surgery Assessment

Before the surgery, you will need scans of your neck to help locate the abnormal parathyroid gland(s). These may include:

- **Ultrasound**
- **Sestamibi scan (a specialised nuclear medicine scan)**
- **CT or MRI scans**

These scans help the surgeon accurately identify the overactive gland(s), making surgery more straightforward.

The Procedure

- A small incision is made in your neck to access the parathyroid glands
- The surgeon identifies and removes the abnormal gland(s) while preserving the healthy ones
- If only one gland is overactive (single adenoma), it will be removed. If more than one gland is affected, the surgeon may need to remove additional glands
- Once the procedure is complete, the incision is closed with fine dissolving stitches, leaving a minimal scar

Parathyroidectomy is usually a safe and well-tolerated procedure, with most patients requiring only an overnight hospital stay before being discharged home.

What Are The Risks Of Parathyroidectomy?

As with any surgical procedure, parathyroidectomy carries some risks, but serious complications are rare. Potential risks include:

Common risks

- **Bleeding** – some bruising may occur, and in rare cases, a collection of blood (**haematoma**) may need draining
- **Infection** – any surgical wound can become infected, though this is uncommon

Less common risks

- **Scar formation** – healing varies between individuals, and some may develop excess scar tissue (keloid scarring)
- **Temporary hypocalcaemia (low calcium levels)** – after surgery, the remaining parathyroid glands may take time to recover, and you may need calcium supplements for a few weeks
- **Persistent hyperparathyroidism** – in rare cases (<5%), the overactive tissue is not completely removed, meaning calcium levels may remain high after surgery
- **Recurrent hyperparathyroidism** – some patients may develop the condition again in the future if another gland becomes overactive
- **Nerve injury** – the nerves that control the vocal cords are close to the parathyroid glands, and although rare, injury to these nerves can cause temporary or permanent changes to your voice
- **Reaction to anaesthesia** – as with any operation under general anaesthetic, there is a small risk of an adverse reaction

Recovery And Aftercare

Most patients recover quickly after parathyroidectomy. You may experience some neck discomfort, mild swelling, or a sore throat for a few days, but this usually resolves on its own.

What To Expect After Surgery

- **Pain management** – mild pain can be managed with paracetamol or ibuprofen
- **Eating and drinking** – you can eat and drink as normal, although it may be uncomfortable to swallow for a short time
- **Activity levels** – you can return to normal daily activities within a few days but should avoid heavy lifting or strenuous exercise for 1–2 weeks
- **Follow-up care** – you will have a post-operative review to check calcium levels and ensure you are recovering well

Most patients notice an improvement in symptoms soon after surgery, especially if their calcium levels return to normal quickly.

When To Seek Medical Advice

After surgery, contact your doctor if you experience:

- Severe swelling or difficulty breathing
- Persistent hoarseness or voice changes
- Signs of infection, such as increasing redness, warmth, or discharge from the wound
- Tingling or numbness in your hands, feet, or around your mouth, which may indicate low calcium levels

Why Choose Birmingham Head And Neck Clinic?

At Birmingham Head and Neck Clinic, our expert surgeons specialise in parathyroid surgery, providing personalised care, advanced diagnostic techniques, and minimally invasive surgical options. We ensure a comprehensive and patient-centred approach, from your initial consultation to post-operative care, helping you achieve the best possible outcomes with short recovery times and minimal scarring.

Contact Us

If you have been diagnosed with hyperparathyroidism and would like to discuss your treatment options, our experienced team is here to help.