Thyroidectomy

What Is A Thyroidectomy?

A thyroidectomy is a surgical procedure to remove part or all of the thyroid gland, which is located at the front of your neck and plays a crucial role in regulating metabolism, energy levels, and hormone production. The surgery is performed to treat thyroid disorders, including:

- **Thyroid nodules or goitre** – enlarged or abnormal growths in the thyroid
- **Thyroid cancer** – removal of the thyroid gland is often necessary to prevent the spread of cancer
- **Hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid)** – caused by conditions like **Graves' disease**
- **Compression symptoms** – if the thyroid is enlarged and pressing on the airway or oesophagus, causing difficulty swallowing or breathing

What Are The Symptoms Of Thyroid Disorders?

Depending on the underlying condition, thyroid problems can cause a variety of symptoms, including:

- **Swelling in the neck** – visible lumps, goitre, or general enlargement
- **Hoarseness or voice changes** – due to pressure on the vocal cords
- **Difficulty swallowing or breathing** – if the thyroid is pressing on the windpipe
- **Unexplained weight changes** – weight gain with an underactive thyroid or weight loss with an overactive thyroid
- **Fatigue and weakness** – feeling unusually tired or sluggish
- **Rapid or irregular heartbeat** – common in hyperthyroidism
- **Anxiety, nervousness, or irritability** – associated with an overactive thyroid

- **Hair thinning or dry skin** – common with thyroid imbalances

If your doctor has recommended thyroid surgery, it is often to relieve symptoms, remove abnormal growths, or manage an overactive thyroid when other treatments have not worked.

How Is Thyroidectomy Performed?

Thyroidectomy is performed under general anaesthesia, meaning you will be completely asleep during the procedure. The type of surgery you need depends on your condition and whether only part or the entire thyroid gland needs to be removed.

Types Of Thyroidectomy

- **Total thyroidectomy** – removal of the entire thyroid gland (often needed for cancer or severe hyperthyroidism)
- **Partial (lobectomy or hemithyroidectomy)** – removal of one side of the thyroid if only part of the gland is affected
- **Subtotal thyroidectomy** – removal of most of the thyroid while leaving a small portion to maintain some function

The Procedure

- A small incision is made at the front of your neck to access the thyroid gland
- The affected portion of the thyroid is carefully removed while preserving surrounding nerves and parathyroid glands
- In some cases, a small drain may be placed temporarily to prevent fluid build-up
- The incision is closed with dissolving stitches, leaving a minimal scar

Most patients will stay in the hospital overnight and can return home the following day.

What Are The Risks Of Thyroidectomy?

Thyroid surgery is generally safe, but as with any operation, there are some potential risks, including:

Common risks

- **Bleeding or bruising** – mild swelling is common, but excessive bleeding is rare
- **Infection** – uncommon but possible at the surgical site
- **Scar formation** – the incision usually heals well, but some individuals may develop excess scar tissue (keloid scarring)

Less common risks

- **Temporary or permanent hoarseness** – due to irritation or injury to the vocal cord nerves
- **Damage to the parathyroid glands** – which may result in low calcium levels (hypocalcaemia), requiring calcium and vitamin D supplements
- **Thyroid hormone imbalance** – if the entire thyroid is removed, you will need lifelong thyroid hormone replacement (levothyroxine)
- **Reaction to anaesthesia** – as with any surgery under general anaesthetic, there is a small risk of complications

Recovery And Aftercare

Most patients recover quickly after thyroidectomy and can return to normal activities within 1–2 weeks.

- **Pain management** – mild discomfort can be treated with paracetamol or ibuprofen
- **Swelling and bruising** – some neck swelling is normal and will gradually improve
- **Eating and drinking** – soft foods may be more comfortable at first, but you can eat normally
- **Voice changes** – your voice may be hoarse or weak for a short time, but this usually improves within a few weeks
- **Follow-up care** – you will have a post-operative review to check your recovery and monitor thyroid function

If your entire thyroid was removed, you will need to take thyroid hormone replacement (levothyroxine) for life to maintain normal metabolism and energy levels. If you have a partial thyroidectomy, the remaining part usually makes enough thyroid hormone. However, it's important to check thyroid function with a blood test a few months after surgery because some people develop an underactive thyroid even when part of their thyroid remains, and need thyroid hormone medication.

After surgery, contact your doctor if you experience:

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

Why Choose Birmingham Head And Neck Clinic?

At Birmingham Head and Neck Clinic, our expert surgeons specialise in thyroid surgery, using the latest techniques to ensure safe, effective, and minimally invasive procedures. We provide personalised care, advanced diagnostics, and a dedicated support team to guide you through every step of your treatment and recovery.

Contact Us

If you have been diagnosed with a thyroid condition and are considering surgery, our experienced team is here to help.