

Thyroid Nodule Ablation: Post-Procedure Patient Instructions

What should I expect after my thyroid nodule ablation procedure?

- Your recovery from the procedure will depend on why you had the procedure and your activity level before you had the procedure.
- There will be no **incisions** (surgical cuts) on your neck from the procedure. The bandage (BAND-AID®) covers the site where the doctor placed the needle for your procedure. You can remove the bandage the day after your procedure. You don't need to replace the bandage or put any other dressing/cover on it.
- You may shower and wash gently with soap and water at any time after your procedure.
- You may see swelling or bruising in the neck area around the thyroid nodule 1-3 days after your procedure. You may also notice swelling, feelings of firmness or fullness in your neck, a "pulling" feeling in your neck tissue, or even some trouble swallowing. These are normal feelings. This often increases for the first 1-2 weeks after your procedure, and then will get better over 6-8 weeks and as your nodule begins to get smaller.
- It can take several months (and up to 1 year) for the thyroid nodule to get smaller after the procedure. As the nodule slowly gets smaller, your **compressive symptoms** (the problems you had before your procedure because of your thyroid nodule) will also start to improve.

How will my neck, head, and shoulders feel after surgery?

- Most patients experience some pain in the area where they had the procedure. You can put a cold pack or ice pack over your neck to help

with any pain and swelling. This helps you the most in the first 48 hours after your procedure.

- You may feel stiffness or soreness in your shoulders, back, or neck. You might also have tension headaches, which can take a few days to go away. These are common symptoms. They are best treated with anti-inflammatory medications (like ibuprofen and naproxen), warm compresses (like a heating pad), and gentle massage over the back of your neck. You may also use a heating pad on the back of your neck or shoulders for 15-20 minutes at a time several times a day. Do not sleep on the heating pad or leave the heating pad directly on your skin for longer than 15-20 minutes to prevent accidental injury or burns.
- The skin just above and below your incision will feel numb right after the procedure from the local anesthetic (medication that numbs an area). This numbness will usually go away over several hours after the procedure.
- Don't be scared to move your neck. You may move your head in all directions after the procedure.

How will I manage my pain at home?

- You can expect to have some pain after the procedure. This is normal. It's usually worse the day after your procedure, and it starts to get better very soon.
- Many patients are able to manage their pain after the procedure with over-the-counter medications (medications you can buy from the pharmacy without a prescription). NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) and acetaminophen (Tylenol®) are most helpful for any pain after thyroid procedures.
 - NSAID medications include ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®) or naproxen (Naprosyn®, Aleve®). You should only take one kind of

NSAID to help you manage pain (do not take both ibuprofen and naproxen).

- **Alternating** NSAIDs and acetaminophen (meaning you start taking them at different times) works better than taking them at the same time.

How to alternate your pain medication:

- Take 650 mg of Tylenol® (2 pills that are 325 mg each) every 6 hours. Alternate this with taking 800 mg of Motrin® (4 pills that are 200 mg each) every 6 hours. This means that you are taking a dose of pain medication **every 3 hours**.
- Here is an example of how you would alternate your pain medications if you take your first dose of Tylenol® at 12:00 PM:

Time:	Pain medication:
12:00 PM	Take Tylenol® 650 mg
3:00 PM	Take Motrin® 800 mg
6:00 PM	Take Tylenol® 650 mg
9:00 PM	Take Motrin® 800 mg
Continue alternating pain medications every 3 hours	

Will my voice be affected by the procedure?

- Your voice may be slightly hoarse or weak after the procedure. This is normal, and it does not mean there was damage to the nerves that make your vocal cords move. Your voice will usually go back to normal within 6-8 weeks after surgery and often after only a few days.

Is there anything I shouldn't eat or drink after the procedure?

- No. Always eat a well-balanced diet (unless your doctor tells you otherwise).

When can I go back to my normal activities?

- You may start doing most of your normal activities as soon as you go home after your procedure. Don't do any heavy lifting (lifting anything over 15 pounds) for the first 2 weeks after the procedure. After 2 weeks, you may slowly start doing all normal activities unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
- You may drive a vehicle (car or truck) as long as you are not taking any **narcotic pain medications** (strong pain medications that can make you sleepy) and you can freely move your head in all directions without feeling pain.
- You may go back to work as soon as you would like (usually within 1-2 days). If your job requires heavy lifting or **strenuous** (very tiring or intense) physical activity, your doctor may ask you to wait to go back to work until after your **post-operative appointment** (your check-up appointment after the procedure).
- Contact one of our Endocrine Surgery outpatient medical assistants at (734) 936-5738 if you need any employer or Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) forms completed.

When will I receive follow-up care?

- The clinic nurse coordinator will call you 1-3 days after your procedure to see how you are feeling.
- You will be scheduled for a follow-up in-clinic return visit with your surgeon about 2 weeks after your procedure.

Can I start taking my medications?

- Please read your discharge summary (the printed report we will give you before you leave the clinic) for the latest and most up-to-date list of medications you should take.

- Before leaving the clinic after your procedure, be sure to review your medications with your doctor or the medical team if you have any questions about what medications you should or should not take.

When should I call my doctor?

Most patients have no problems after their procedure. Call us if you have the following issues:

- If you have trouble talking or breathing
- If you get a fever greater than 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit
 - We do not recommend you regularly take your temperature. Take your temperature only if you feel like you have a fever. It is common to have a very small fever in the late afternoon or early evening. This does not mean you have an infection.
- If you have yellow sputum (fluid) when you cough
- If your neck becomes red, very swollen, or begins to drain (leak) fluid

Who should I call if I have questions?

Please try to call during the day between 7:30 AM and 4:30 PM, but you may call at any time if there is a problem.

- **Call Center: 734-936-5738**

During business hours (Monday through Friday, 8 AM – 4 PM), contact the Call Center and ask for the Endocrine Surgery nurse coordinator.

- **Hospital Paging: 734-936-6267**

On weekends, holidays, or evenings after business hours, call Hospital Paging and ask for the General Surgery Blue Team resident-on-call. You may also call the main hospital number at (734) 936-4000.

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