NHS
Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Advice following salivary gland / neck surgery including branchial cyst / neck node biopsy

Information for patients

This leaflet gives aftercare advice for patients who have had salivary gland or neck surgery. If you do not understand anything or have any other concerns, please speak to a member of staff.

Risks and complications

Your surgeon will have already discussed with you both the benefits and risks of the operation you are having prior to you signing the consent form. The main risks include pain, bleeding, swelling and bruising, haematoma (swelling with blood), nerve damage, altered sense of taste and infection.

Neck wound

You will have a wound on your neck and you may have some bruising around this area. A surgical drain is usually inserted into the wound this helps to reduce any swelling and collection of blood in the cavity where the gland was. The drain is usually removed the day you leave hospital. You may have some numbness around your ear that should go in a few weeks.

Pain

The wound may be uncomfortable and you may find chewing uncomfortable for a few days. Taking painkillers regularly, about 30 minutes before meals, and eating a soft diet for a few days will not only make you more comfortable but will assist your recovery.

You can take Paracetamol or Ibuprofen for pain relief – they work best if taken regularly and it is important that you do not exceed the stated dose.

Food and fluids

Eating and drinking is important as it involves using the muscles of the throat and also you need the nutrition, which aids healing. We recommend a soft diet for the first few days until you feel comfortable with chewing, and then resume your normal diet.

Stitches/clips

Dissolvable stitches are often used but if not, stitches or clips are used. Non-dissolvable stitches/clips are removed 5-7 days after surgery. Your nurse or your doctor will advise on this. You will need to make an appointment with the nurse at your GP surgery to have your sutures or clips removed. If necessary, we can make this appointment for you. If you have clips, you will be given a clip remover to take with you for your practice nurse.

Reducing the risk of wound swelling

Try to sleep with your head elevated if you can. Use 2-3 pillows for this. Avoid lying on the affected side.

Reducing the risk of wound infection

You may be given seven days' supply of antibiotics to take home which you need to take as prescribed until you finish the course.

It is important that you avoid touching the wound on your neck. If you have to, make sure that you have washed your hands to reduce the risk of infection.

Depending on how your wound has been closed you may be asked to keep your wound dry until all non-dissolvable stitches/clips are out.

Things to look out for:

- Your neck wound is red, swollen and discharging;
- You feel feverish and unwell;
- You have an increased pain in your neck not controlled by your current painkillers.

If you experience any of the above, you may be developing an infection and may require further short course of antibiotics. You need to contact the ENT Outpatient department (during office hours) or the ward (out of hours) for advice. The ward may put you in touch with the on-call doctor. Telephone numbers are at the back of this booklet.

Returning to work

You will need to take up to two weeks off work, depending on the nature of your job. You may need a sick certificate for your employer so please ask your doctor or your nurse before you leave hospital.

Follow-up

You will usually be seen in an outpatient clinic following your surgery. An appointment will be sent to you in the post. If you cannot attend please telephone 0118 322 7139 to arrange another one.

We wish you a speedy recovery and hope this leaflet has been useful.

Contact us

- Greenlands Ward
  0118 322 7172
- ENT Outpatient Department
  01865 903 274

ENT appointments (CAT 1)
0118 322 7139
Email: rbbh-tr.cat1@nhs.net

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Dorrell Ward, October 2026. Next review due: October 2028.