Parotid Gland Surgery

What is the Parotid Gland?

The parotid gland is a wedge shaped gland that makes saliva (spit) and is located in front of each ear. Saliva is important because it helps break down the food we eat. The facial nerve goes through the parotid gland dividing it into the superficial lobe (closer to the skin) and a deep lobe.
Small tumors sometimes grow in the parotid gland. These tumors may or may not be cancer. Symptoms may include:

- A tumor that can be felt on your skin near the gland
- A swollen lymph node in your neck
- Weakness in your face muscles

A **parotidectomy** is when your parotid gland is removed. Your doctor will decide if you need to have this surgery.

**What to Expect after Surgery**

After your surgery you will be taken to your hospital room to recover. You may have a drain in place after the surgery near the incision. A drain is a small tube that is inserted during surgery. The tube has a bulb on the end to collect fluid from inside the incision. The doctor will remove the tube when the drainage amount is normal. This may happen before you go home.

You may have **facial nerve weakness** after surgery. This weakness is usually temporary, but may be permanent depending on the location of the tumor. Weakness is most common when the surgery includes both lobes of the parotid gland. This weakness will make your face droop on the side where the gland was removed. You may find it difficult to chew, smile, and move that side of the face with this type of weakness.

A common long term side effect after a parotidectomy is called **Frey Syndrome** (sweating or flushing on your face while eating). This syndrome may take up to 6 months to develop. Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about Frey Syndrome.

If your doctor removes the deep lobe of the parotid gland you may develop **first bite syndrome** (pain with the first bite of food). This usually goes away with time or can be lessened by eating bland food at the beginning of each meal.

**When should I call the doctor?**

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

- Chills or fever of 101 degrees Fahrenheit (38.3 degrees Celsius) or higher
• Signs of infection at the incision site (redness, warmth, or swelling)
• Foul smelling or an increased amount of drainage from the incision site
• Pain that gets worse and not relieved by pain medicine