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Parotidectomy

What is a parotidectomy?

A parotidectomy is a procedure in which the doctor removes one of your parotid glands. The parotid glands are in the cheeks just in front of and slightly below your ears. They produce saliva.

When is it used?

Reasons for performing this procedure include:

- The parotid gland could be swollen, enlarged, and/or contain a lump which may or may not be cancerous.
- The duct carrying saliva from the parotid gland may be blocked by a stone.

An example of alternatives is to choose to do nothing, recognizing the risks of your condition.

How do I prepare for a parotidectomy?

Plan for your care and recovery after the operation, especially if you are to have general anesthesia. Allow for time to rest and try to find people to help you with your day-to-day duties.

Do not take aspirin for a week before the operation.

Follow any instructions your doctor may give you. Eat a light meal, such as soup or salad, the night before the procedure. Do not eat or drink anything after midnight and the morning before the procedure. Do not even drink coffee, tea, or water.

What happens during the procedure?

You will receive a general anesthetic. This drug will make you feel like you are in a deep sleep, relax your muscles, and keep you from feeling pain.

The doctor will make a cut around the bottom of your ear and under your jaw. The doctor will fold the skin back and expose the parotid gland. The doctor will remove any tumor he or she finds and remove any stones in the gland. If the doctor finds a tumor, he or she may remove only half of the gland or all of it, depending on the type of tumor. The doctor will try to avoid injuring the nerves that lie directly over the gland and control facial muscle movement. If you have cancer around the nerve, the doctor may remove the tumor and that part of the nerve. The doctor will close the cut.

What happens after the procedure?

You may be in the hospital for at least a day. The side of your face will be swollen and black and blue for about 3 weeks and sore for at least a week. If any of the nerves in your cheeks were bruised, the side of your face may be numb, the muscles may be weak, and your face may droop for 3 to 6 weeks or permanently. During this time, you may feel pain when chewing.

Ask your doctor what steps you should take and when you should come back for a checkup.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

You will no longer have the pain and/or swelling that caused the problem around the parotid gland. If there was cancer, it may be removed.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

- There are some risks when you have general anesthesia. Discuss these risks with your doctor.
- The nerves in your cheek may be damaged or cut during this operation. If this happens, one or more of the muscles in your face may not work as before and that side of your face could droop and look different from the other side. You may not be able to move your lip as well as before. This could either be temporary or permanent.
- If you had cancer, it may not be entirely removed and further treatment may be necessary.
- If you had cancer, it may come back.
- Infection or bleeding may occur.

You should ask your doctor how these risks apply to you.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor immediately if:

- You develop a fever.
- You notice drainage or bleeding from the wound.

Call the doctor during office hours if:

- You have questions about the procedure or its result.
- You want to make another appointment.