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REMOVAL OF PAROTID SALIVARY GLAND

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of your forthcoming treatment and contains answers to many of the common questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further information please ask.

What is the parotid gland?

The parotid is a salivary gland that lies immediately in front of the ear. Saliva drains from it through a tube, the parotid duct, that opens on the inside of the cheek next to the upper back teeth. The parotid gland is most commonly operated on to remove a lump. The most important fact about this gland is that the facial nerve runs through it.

What does the operation involve?

The parotid gland is removed under general anaesthesia, ie you are put to sleep completely. The operation involves making a cut immediately in front of the ear. This cut is extended downwards into the neck or behind the ear. Once the gland has been removed the incision is held together again with stitches. It is sometimes possible to use dissolving stitches but if these are not used, the stitches need to be removed around a week after surgery. At the end of the operation a small tube or drain may be needed to drain any blood which may collect. This is usually removed on the morning following surgery.

Will anything else be done while I am asleep?

If your gland is being removed because of infection caused by a stone, it may also be necessary to make a cut inside the mouth to remove that stone within the duct.

How long will the operation take?

Removal of all or part of the parotid gland is a complex operation which usually takes two to three hours.

What can I expect after the operation?

You usually need a night in hospital following the surgery. It is unlikely to be very sore but regular painkillers will be arranged for you. There is relatively little swelling following parotid gland removal. Since part of the gland is taken away it can leave a dent or hollow just in front of the ear.

Do I need any time off work?

It is usually advisable to take at least a week off from work to recover from the surgery and anaesthetic. During this time you should avoid strenuous activity.

Is there anything that I need to do when I get home?

It is important to keep the wound dry for the first week following surgery. This obviously means you need to take care when washing or shaving. If the wound does get wet it needs to be gently patted dry with a clean towel.

Will I have a scar?

All cuts made through the skin will leave a scar but the majority of these fade with time. It may take several months for your scar to fade but eventually it should blend into the natural folds and contours of your face.

What are the possible problems?

- Bleeding from the wound occurs occasionally. If this happens, it usually does so within the first 12 hours of surgery which is why most people stay in hospital overnight.
- It is usual to give a dose of antibiotics intravenously at the beginning of the operation. Infection is therefore uncommon but if your surgeon thinks there is a risk to you, a short course of post-operative antibiotics will also be prescribed.
- Sometimes saliva leaks out of the wound – this is called a salivary fistula. This problem usually settles down on its own but can take several weeks to get better.

The surgeon tells me that damage to nerves is possible. What does this mean?

The facial nerve runs through of the parotid gland. It is the nerve that makes the muscles of the face work. Damage to branches of the nerve can result in weakness of the muscles on that side of your face. Most injury occurs as a result of bruising since the facial nerve is

held out of the way and protected during surgery. If nerve injury occurs it is usually temporary although it can take several months to recover fully.

The nerve that supplies feeling to your ear lobe (greater auricular nerve) sometimes requires removal to gain access to the parotid gland and as a result you may end up with numbness or tingling around your ear lobe and the angle of the lower jaw.

Is permanent nerve damage possible?

Although the majority of damage to the nerves is temporary, permanent damage is possible but usually only occurs in the most difficult cases.

Are there any long-term effects if I have my parotid gland removed?

The removal of one parotid gland will not have an impact on the amount of saliva that you produce. There are many other salivary glands left in and around the mouth that will keep it moist.

Some patients notice that the skin in front of the ear sweats excessively after the parotid gland has been removed – this is called gustatory sweating or Frey's syndrome. If this is going to occur, it does so many months after the surgery. The sweating is particularly noticeable around mealtimes when the skin can be red and warm. If this occurs it can usually be alleviated with simple treatments that do not require further surgery.

For further advice and information please see the web pages of The British Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons www.baoms.org.uk