



Greenville Ear, Nose & Throat

Neck Dissection: What You Need to Know

You are scheduled to have a dissection (functional, modified or radical) for a tumor in your neck. Before having surgery, it is important that you know some of the risks and complications involving this surgery. These risks and complications are listed below:

Weakness of the lip, tongue, shoulder, diaphragm or vocal cord: The nerves going to these areas all travel through the neck. Thus, these nerves are at risk with any neck surgery. On occasion, one or more of these nerves must be removed with a tumor in the neck. Paralysis of one or more of these structures may result. In other cases, the paralysis may be short term and need no additional therapy.

Infection: Infection can occur with any surgery. The risk increases when a neck dissection is combined with a procedure that allows entry into the upper digestive tract. In addition, a severe infection of the neck may result in loss of part of the skin of the neck, though this is rare. Such an occurrence increases when the neck has received radiation in the past. Overcoming an infection often requires a lengthy stay in the hospital and, in some cases, another surgery.

Bleeding: Major bleeding from the neck is extremely rare after surgery. When it does occur, the bleeding requires surgical repair right away.

Chylous leak: The major lymph vessels end in the lower part of the neck. On occasion, such vessels are part of the neck dissection. A leak may result if a collection of lymph fluid forms underneath the skin of the neck. Such a collection may need prompt removal and external compression.

Carotid artery injury: A major carotid artery injury is rare in a routine neck dissection. In some cases, removing the outer lining of the artery is required during removal of a tumor. A tear in the artery often is corrected by a simple repair. On extremely rare occasions, more extensive repair (called ligation) of the artery is needed. Ligation is linked with death in 20% of cases and stroke in 25% of cases.

Anesthesia complications: Risks are involved with any anesthesia. Please discuss these risks with the anesthesiologist if you like.

In addition to the risks and complications listed above, unforeseen complications associated with any operation may occur.

Please call our office if you have questions about this information:

- Patewood (864) 454-4368
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