



Greenville Ear, Nose & Throat

Parotidectomy: Risks and Complications

The parotid gland is a major salivary gland. There are two glands, one on each side of the face over the angle of the jaw.

Tumors of the parotid gland are fairly common. Removal of the tumor usually is recommended. About 20% of these tumors are cancerous.

Risks and Complications

Infection: Infection is possible with any surgery. Fortunately, it is rare with this sort of surgery. When it does occur, it may require taking antibiotics for a long time and hospitalization.

Salivary leak: On occasion, ongoing drainage of saliva through a part of the stitches occurs. It usually is corrected by applying pressure dressings. Surgery rarely is needed.

Facial palsy: Partial or total loss of facial nerve function can occur with this surgery. In most cases, the loss is temporary.

If paralysis is permanent, additional surgery involving grafting is required. In this instance, a temporary tarsorrhaphy (partial closure of the eyelid) often is suggested.

If the nerve is removed as part of the resection for a tumor, immediate or delayed facial nerve grafting will be performed. Such grafting generally involves removing the greater auricular nerve on the opposite side of the face and neck. When grafting is required, some return of function occurs in 70% of cases.

Earlobe numbness: The nerves that supply sensation to the front of the ear and the earlobe are cut during a parotidectomy (whether total or superficial), which results in numbness in the area. Such numbness is to be expected. On occasion, some sensation returns.

Frey's syndrome: Sweating in the parotid region during or after a meal occurs in about 2% of patients who have a parotidectomy. The cause of this syndrome is the result of nerve re-routing during healing. This condition usually is treated medically.

General anesthesia: Risks are involved with any anesthesia, including breathing problems, irregular heartbeat and death.

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