Parathyroid Surgery

What do the parathyroid glands do and where are they located?
The parathyroids are small glands in the neck near the thyroid gland. They control the balance of calcium in the body by affecting calcium absorption, bone calcium and vitamin D. Vitamin D is critical in calcium uptake.

What is hyperparathyroidism?
Hyperparathyroidism is over activity of one or more of the parathyroid glands. This over activity causes bone calcium loss and higher than normal calcium in the blood and urine.

Is hyperparathyroidism inherited?
This condition can run in some families, though more commonly it occurs without any family history.

What is the treatment for hyperparathyroidism?
For most patients, the treatment involves surgical removal of the overactive parathyroid gland or glands (if there is more than one overactive gland).

How is parathyroid surgery done?
In most cases, a small incision is made in the front of the neck and the enlarged gland is removed. In some cases the gland is first labeled with a radioactive tracer: this may allow the surgeon to make a smaller incision.

What is the usual recovery from surgery?
In most cases patients go home the same day as surgery, some patients may stay one night in the hospital. Recovery from parathyroid surgery is usually quick with minimal pain requiring pain medication for only a day or two and most people return to work in a week or less. Occasionally, extra calcium might need to be taken after surgery to replenish bone calcium and prevent low blood calcium levels.
Is hyperparathyroidism ever due to cancer?
Rarely is this condition due to a parathyroid gland cancer. In the vast majority of patients, there is no malignancy. In addition, the gland is always sent for testing to rule out cancer after the surgery.

Can hyperparathyroidism recur?
It’s possible but rare. In less than 5% of patients the condition will either not respond to surgery or recur later. The majority of patients are cured permanently by surgery.

Will my voice be affected by surgery?
In less than 1% of patients there will be a long-lasting voice change due to the surgery, but the majority of patients have no trouble with their voices.

Will calcium pills be needed forever after parathyroid surgery?
Although it is not uncommon to need calcium pills following surgery for a short time, most patients go off calcium shortly thereafter and many patients need no extra calcium at all.

What are the symptoms of hyperparathyroidism?
Many people have no symptoms and the condition is discovered with a routine blood test. Others have symptoms such as bone pain, osteoporosis, decreased memory, depression, fatigue, abdominal pain or kidney stones. In general, the symptoms resolve with time after surgery.