

Parotidectomy

What is the parotid gland?

The parotid gland is one of the body's major "spit glands." Spit, or saliva, is essential in lubrication of the mouth and throat, as well as having digestive and antibacterial properties. The parotid is located just in front of the ear. There is a parotid gland on each side of the face. Removal of it does not result in a noticeable loss of saliva, as the other major spit glands and smaller spit glands can compensate.

When is surgery called for?

- (1) To remove a tumor or mass in the gland, either benign or cancerous.
- (2) To alleviate chronic inflammation/infection.

What is done at surgery?

The diseased gland is carefully dissected from the surrounding normal tissue and facial nerve. In most cases all vital structures are preserved.

What can be expected after surgery?

- (1) A scar will be located in front of the ear that may extend behind the ear and down into the neck. A defect, or divot, may result where the parotid used to be.
- (2) Expect transient numbness of the skin around the ear, and this may sometimes become permanent.
- (3) Bleeding, leading to a large bruise or hematoma, may develop that requires surgical drainage.
- (4) Infection is possible but is usually rare.
- (5) Tumors or cancer can recur.
- (6) Facial nerve paralysis. The face nerve allows one side of the face to raise the eyebrow, close the eyelids, wrinkle the nose, and smile. If it were injured, you would not be able to move that side. The nerve might need to be cut if it is involved with cancer. More often, the face might be temporarily "paralyzed," but return of function would be expected back in weeks to months.
- (7) Tendency to sweat on the side of the face that underwent surgery during eating.