

Parotid & Salivary Glands

The parotid is the largest salivary gland (makes spit). It is the large gland on the side of the face that swells up when someone gets the mumps. Other major salivary glands include the submandibular and sublingual glands. These glands can quite often enlarge due to a tumor or blockage. Most of the tumors that grow in the salivary glands are benign, but because it is difficult to know whether or not they are cancerous they are almost always removed.

Blockages can also cause problems in a salivary gland. Just like a dammed up creek will become stagnant, the same thing can happen in the salivary gland. This is most often because a stone blocks up the duct in the gland, just like a kidney stone blocks up the kidney. The gland behind the blockage becomes stagnant and infected. Often an antibiotic will clear it up, but often it will not. Things like increasing the amount of water, and eating foods that really make your salivary glands squeeze all the spit out (such as lemon drops) can help clear these blockages; but, they can also just cause a bigger back up if the dam does not break. If you are taking lemon drops for a swollen parotid gland, and it is causing a lot more pain, do not continue to use them, your blockage is too bad.

What is the parotid and submandibular gland needed for: They make spit. There are 3 major salivary glands, and about 1000 minor ones.

Why do you remove the parotid or submandibular glands: Either because of a tumor, or because a blockage does not allow saliva to freely flow and has become infected.

How do you remove the parotid: The parotid is removed from an incision just in front of your ear and down your neck. It is a fairly large incision, but it is a modification of the facelift incision so usually results are a barely noticeable scar. The facial nerve (which controls all the motion in your face) runs right through the middle of your parotid so great care must be taken not to injure this nerve. For this reason I use a nerve integrity monitor during all my parotid surgeries.

How do you remove the submandibular glands: The submandibular gland is just under the jaw. The incision for this surgery is made in a natural skin crease in the neck. There are many nerves and blood vessels in this area, and a nerve integrity monitor is used to monitor one of the branches of the facial nerve. The sublingual gland is removed in a very similar fashion.

What are the risks of parotid or submandibular gland surgery: By far the biggest risk is damage to the facial nerve. While this rarely happens, it can leave your face paralyzed.

Important post-op instructions: You will likely have a drain in for a day after surgery. This is usually pulled out the day after surgery and you are allowed to go home. The sutures and staples are removed about week after surgery.

Long term ramifications: While some have some dry mouth after surgery, most notice very little change in the amount of saliva. With parotid surgery you will very likely loose feeling in your earlobe and the area around the lower half of your ear. There is also often a divot just in front of the ear, depending on the size of the mass removed.

How long does surgery last: Submandibular gland surgery usually only takes about 45 minutes, but can take much longer depending on the gland. Parotid surgery usually takes about 2 hours due to the work on the facial nerve.

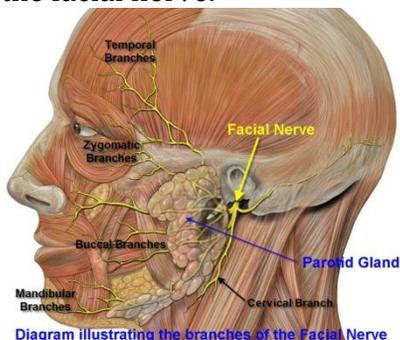
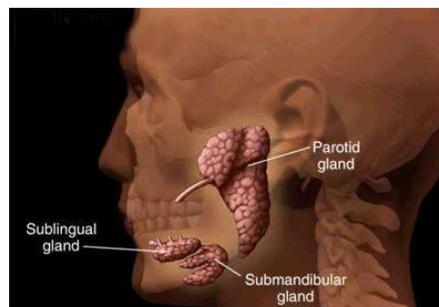


Diagram illustrating the branches of the Facial Nerve

The facial nerve controls all the movement of the face, and runs right through the parotid gland.



© Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. All rights reserved.

The three major salivary glands.



NIMS: The nerve integrity monitor