

New Treatment Options Can Simplify Thyroid Surgery



Kim and her daughter, Hannah, share a family history of thyroid cancer. When Kim's doctor found a lump on her thyroid gland, she chose minimally invasive surgery at Jersey Shore for treatment.

When Kimberley Tichansky's gynecologist identified a thyroid issue during a routine exam, she was referred to an endocrinologist for a more detailed workup. Kim and her physicians were concerned because she has a family history of cancer and thyroid disease.

When Kim's condition seemed to be worsening, she made an appointment with Melissa Young, M.D., a board certified specialist in endocrinology, diabetes, and metabolism. Her thyroid gland had a nodule that was becoming increasingly enlarged.

About 85 percent of thyroid nodules in women are benign. But issues with the thyroid gland can result in conditions that need to be examined by a specialist, including

problems with metabolism, energy levels, and emotions — in addition to discomfort that can impact swallowing and breathing. In some cases the nodes may be cancerous.

"Kim and I discussed her options, including medical treatment, biopsy, and surgery," Dr. Young explains. "Based on her age, the size of the nodule as measured by ultrasound, and Kim's family history of cancer, I recommended surgery."

Kim was not fearful of surgery. "Dr. Young is extremely professional and compassionate," she says. "Every time I've called the office since the appointment, Dr. Young calls me back directly. I was very confident in her and the surgeon, Dr. Shifrin."

Alexander Shifrin, M.D., is one of the

ABOUT *the* DOCTORS



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only fellowship-trained endocrine surgeons in the region. He has brought a new, minimally invasive technique to the area, and he used it to remove Kim's thyroid.

Dr. Shifrin explains the new approach: "The incision is less than an inch, and it can be done in an existing crease in the neck so that the scar is not visible. No stitches are needed. No drains or bandages are necessary either, and the surgery is performed under local anesthesia, so no breathing tube is needed. There is very little pain associated with this surgery."

"Even though I was in the hospital for less than 24 hours for the procedure, Dr. Shifrin visited me two times after the surgery," says Kim. "The time was less than 30 days between when I saw Dr. Young and when the surgery was performed by Dr. Shifrin."

For follow-up care, Dr. Young prescribed medications to replace the hormone the removed thyroid would have made. A small trace of cancer in Kim's thyroid was diagnosed from tissue samples collected during surgery, so she will receive a radioactive iodine treatment and nuclear medicine imaging as part of her care.

Since the surgery, Kim has been able to resume her usual activities. "I feel really well. I was back at work within a week," she says. "My family has a history of thyroid cancer, and all of them had the traditional surgery, which had a longer recovery and lasting scar.

"I'm relieved the surgery is over and the recovery was easy." ■ — *Ryan Younger*

Women and all adults older than 50 are at a higher risk for low thyroid levels. Symptoms include weakness, joint or muscle pain, and an intolerance to cold. If you experience these signs of a thyroid problem, see your health care provider. If you are looking for a local physician, go to MeridianHealth.com and click "Find a Physician."