

## Surgical Aspects of The Thyroid Gland

**History:** Once upon a time, thyroid disease was a much more devastating and lethal disease than it is today. Iodine deficiency was endemic in many parts of the world. Patients commonly developed enormous goiters. From compression alone, many people died of tracheal or esophageal obstruction. When hyperactivity occurred, patients died of high output heart failure or thyroid crisis, commonly known as thyroid storm. Many famous surgeons of the late 19th and early 20th century were involved in the study of thyroid surgery. When you become old enough to be interested in medical history, and you will if you live long enough, you may find the history of thyroid surgery particularly interesting since it represents a prototype for the triumph of surgery as in modern medicine. There is a classic review of the subject written by a well known Louisiana surgeon, Dr. Walter Becker. The paper was delivered by Dr. Becker as his presidential address to the Southern Surgical Association. It is printed in the Transactions of the

Combined On  
4-13-99 - Surg of  
Parathyroids +  
Other endocrine glands

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Southern Surgical, vol 88, 1976, and in The Annals of Surgery, May 1977.

Three discoveries were necessary before thyroidectomy became technically feasible:

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1. The discovery of anesthesia by Morton, Wells, and Long in the 1840's
2. The discovery of antiseptics and its corollary asepsis by Lister in the 1860's
3. The development of surgical forceps and hemostats in several German centers in the same decade.

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This enabled Dr. Theodore Kocher, Professor at the University of Berne, whose picture is shown here, to develop anatomical thyroid operations which are practiced with only minor changes some 120 years later.

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