

Preventing Surgical Site Infections

What You Need to Know About Infections After Surgery

A FACT SHEET FOR PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS

Most patients who have surgery do well. But sometimes patients do develop infections. A surgical site infection is an infection that occurs following a procedure usually at the part of the body where the surgery took place. This happens to about 1-3 of every 100 patients who have surgery. Infections after surgery can lead to other problems. Sometimes, these patients require additional treatments and some will have an extended recovery times.

Rarely, patients die from infections. Patients and their family members can help lower the risk of infection after surgery. Here are some ways:

AT THE TIME OF SURGERY

- Tell the anesthesiologist (doctor or nurse who puts you to sleep for surgery) about all the medications you take. A good way to do this is to bring a written up-to-date medication list with you.
- Let the anesthesiologist know if you have diabetes or high blood sugar, or if family members do. People with high blood sugar have a greater chance of getting infections after surgery.
- Speak up if someone tries to shave you with a **razor** before surgery. Ask why you need to be shaved and talk with your surgeon if you have any concerns.
- Ask for blankets or other ways to stay warm while you wait for surgery. Find out how you will be kept warm during and after surgery. Ask for extra blankets if you feel cold.
- Ask if you will get antibiotic medicine. If so, find out how many doses you will get. Most people receive only one dose before surgery and are on antibiotics for just one

day after surgery, as taking too much can lead to other problems.

AFTER YOUR SURGERY

- Make sure that all of your healthcare providers clean their hands before examining you; either with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Family and friends who visit you should not touch the surgical wound or dressing.
- Family and friends should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after visiting you. If you do not see them clean their hands, ask them to.
- Before you go home, your doctor should provide instructions that explain everything you need to know about taking care of your wound. Make sure you understand how to care for your wound before you leave the Center.
- Always clean your hands before and after caring for your wound.
- If you have any symptoms of an infection, such as redness and pain at the surgery site, drainage, or fever, call our doctor immediately.

If you do not see your providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.

LEARN MORE

You can learn more about Surgical Site Infection as it relates to the 5 Million Lives Campaign at www.ihc.org.

Source: Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 5 million Lives Campaign, 2008