

# Preventing infection after your surgery



Cottage  
Health

# Frequently Asked Questions

- **What is a surgical site infection?**

A surgical site infection is an infection that occurs after surgery, in the part of the body where the surgery took place.

- **What causes surgical site infections?**

GERMS are everywhere. They're on your skin, in the air and on things you touch. Many germs are good, but some are harmful. Surgical site infections occur when harmful germs enter your body through the incision in your skin. Some infections are caused by germs that are in the air or on objects, but most are caused by germs found on and in your own body.

- **What are common symptoms of a surgical site infection?**

Infection usually starts with increased **skin redness**, **pain** and **swelling** around the incision.

If left untreated, later you may notice a cloudy or greenish-yellow **discharge** from the incision and it may develop a **foul odor**. The incision may separate or open up. You are also likely to have a fever and may feel very ill.

Symptoms can appear any time from hours to weeks after surgery. Implants such as an artificial knee or hip can become infected at any time after the operation.

# What **You** Can Do to Prevent Surgical Site Infections

- Take antibiotics only when your healthcare provider tells you to. Finish the entire prescription of your antibiotics, even if you feel better.
- After surgery, eat healthy foods, limit sugar and salt.
- Care for your incision as directed by your doctor or nurse, **making sure to wash your hands before and after.**
- Continue to follow good oral hygiene, brush teeth with toothbrush and toothpaste of choice, including your tongue and cheeks (then rinse thoroughly).
- Get up as soon as possible after surgery. Walk at least four times daily.
- Cough and take deep breaths; bracing incision site with a firm pillow. Use your incentive spirometer several times a day (if you watch TV, a good time is during the commercials).
- If you have a caregiver help you with cleaning, dressing changes, and wound checks, make sure they wash their hands before and after they assist you.
- Don't allow pets near or on your wound. Wash your hands after you handle your pet.
- Use a clean towel after every shower or bath.

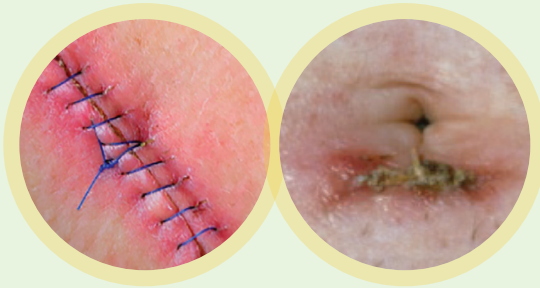
## Examples of clean versus infected wounds

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### Clean and healing



### Infected, call doctor



### Infected, go to the Emergency Room



# When to **Call** Your Healthcare Provider

## All Clear

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- I feel great!
- Incision is clean, dry. No redness, swelling, drainage
- No fever
- Able to eat healthy meals, walk several times per day, sleep well

## Caution - Call Doctor

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- Wound is red, draining pus, swollen, hot to touch
- Not healing
- Feeling very tired, weak, dizzy
- Fever over 100.5 F.
- Not able to eat well, nor walk, nor sleep well

## Emergency - Seek Help Now. Call 911.

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- Fever over 101.5 F.
- Nausea/vomiting unable to eat, drink or take medication
- Unable to get out of bed or care for yourself

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