

Surgical Site Infections: Frequently Asked Questions

This sheet will help answer frequently asked questions about surgical site infections.

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. Most patients who have surgery do not develop an infection.

Some of the common symptoms of a surgical site infection are:

- Redness and pain around the area where you had the surgery
- Drainage of cloudy fluid from the surgical wound
- Fever

Can surgical site infections be treated?

Yes. Most surgical site infections can be treated with antibiotics. The antibiotic you are given depends on the cause of the infection.

What other things are hospitals doing to prevent surgical site infections?

To prevent surgical site infections, doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers:

- Clean their hands and arms up to their elbows with an antiseptic agent just before surgery.
- Clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for each patient.
- May remove the hair around your surgery site just prior to surgery.
- Wear special hair covers, masks, gowns and gloves during surgery to keep the surgery area clean.

- Clean the skin at the site of your surgery with a special soap that kills germs. In most cases, antibiotics will be given before and after surgery.

What can I do to help prevent surgical site infections?

BEFORE SURGERY:

- Tell your doctor about other medical conditions you may have. Health concerns such as allergies, diabetes and obesity could affect your surgery and your treatment.
- Quit smoking. Patients who smoke get more infections. Talk to your doctor about how you can quit smoking before your surgery.
- Do not shave near the area where you will have surgery. Shaving with a razor can irritate your skin, making it easier to develop an infection. If necessary, the healthcare provider will remove hair with special clippers.

AT THE TIME OF SURGERY:

- Ask questions if you have them or do not understand something.
- Ask if you will receive antibiotics before surgery.

AFTER SURGERY:

- Make sure your healthcare providers clean their hands before examining you, either with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.

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- If you do not see the providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so. Family and friends who visit you should not touch the surgical wound or dressings.
- 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 clean their hands.

What do I need to do when I go home from the hospital?

- Before you go home, your doctor or nurse should explain everything you need to know about taking care of your wound. Ensure you understand how to care for your wound before leaving the hospital.
- Always clean your hands before and after caring for your wound.
- Before you go home, make sure you know who to contact if you have questions or problems after you get home.

Call your doctor immediately if you have any symptoms of an infection, such as:

- Redness
- Pain at the surgery site
- Drainage
- Fever

If you have any questions, please contact your doctor.