

Preventing Surgical Site Infections

What Is a Surgical Site Infection (SSI)?

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 don't develop an infection. However, infections can develop in approximately one to three of every 100 patients who have surgery.

Common Signs of a Surgical Site Infection:

- Redness and pain around the surgical site
 - Bruising is a normal part of the recovery process after surgery and is typically blue, purple or black.
- Drainage of cloudy fluid from your surgical wound
- Fever

Can SSIs Be Treated?

Yes. Most SSIs can be treated with antibiotics. The antibiotic used depends on the bacteria (*germs*) causing the infection. Sometimes patients with SSIs also need another surgery to treat the infection.

Preventing SSIs During Your Hospital Stay

To prevent SSIs, doctors, nurses and other health care team members may include the following in your treatment plan:

- Use of a chin-to-toes body wash with a special, rinse-free antibacterial cloth, if necessary
- You may be asked to brush your teeth, gums and tongue with an oral solution and rinse.
- May remove some of your hair immediately before your surgery if the hair is in the same area where the procedure will occur
- May provide warm blankets to prevent heat loss
- May provide you with supplementary oxygen, if needed
- You may receive antibiotics, if indicated, before surgery starts to prevent infections

What Can I Do to Prevent SSIs?

Before your surgery:

- Tell your doctor about other medical problems you may have. Health problems 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 ways to quit before your surgery.
- Don't shave near where you'll have surgery. Shaving with a razor can irritate your skin and make it easier to develop an infection.
- Eat a well-balanced diet, including protein sources (*such as dairy products, meat, eggs, beans, nuts, chicken and fish*) with every meal and snack. Drink plenty of fluids, unless you've been told to limit fluid intake by your doctor. Consider an oral nutrition supplement (*like Ensure or Boost*) if you have trouble eating enough at meal times.



Bathing Prior to Surgery

Specific bathing procedures or “prepping” are recommended to decrease your risk of infection in your incision(s) after surgery. Based on expert recommendations, you may be asked to shower (*as shown to the right*) every day, for five days, prior to surgery.

After Your Surgery

- Make sure that your health care providers wash their hands before examining you, either with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- **If you don't see your health care providers wash or clean their hands, please ask them to do so.**
- Family and friends should wash their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after visiting you. If you don't see them wash or clean their hands, ask them to do so.
- Family and friends who visit you shouldn't touch the surgical wound or dressings.

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. Make sure you understand how to care for your wound before you leave the hospital. Make sure you know who to contact if you have questions or problems after you get home.
- Always wash your hands before and after caring for your wound.
- Use clean towels after every shower.
- Use fresh sheets when you return home. Change them when they're dirty/soiled.
- To reduce bruising and swelling, rest and elevate the site as your surgeon instructs you.
- Avoid activities that could cause dirt or sweat to get into your incision site.
- Don't allow pets to sleep in the bed or come in direct contact with the incision site. Wash your hands after touching animals.
- Don't touch or pick at scabs. They help protect the wound.
- Don't take a tub bath until your doctor says it's alright.
- Don't apply any lotions, ointments or powders unless you've been told to do so by your doctor.
- Don't allow family and friends to touch the surgical wound or dressing(s), unless otherwise instructed.
- Don't rub the incision, and be sure to keep it clean and dry. Pat sutures dry if they get wet.
- Continue to eat a well-balanced diet, including protein sources (*such as dairy products, meat, eggs, beans, nuts, chicken and fish*) with every meal and snack. Drink plenty of fluids, unless you've been told to limit fluid intake by your doctor. Consider an oral nutrition supplement (*like Ensure or Boost*) if you have trouble eating enough at meal times. Ask your doctor for a referral to a BayCare outpatient registered dietitian if you have additional nutrition-related questions or concerns.
- **If you have any symptoms of an infection, such as redness and worsening pain at the surgery site, drainage and/or fever, call your doctor immediately.**

If you have additional questions, please ask your health care team.

Bathing Prior to Surgery

1



Wet your entire body.

2



Wet a clean washcloth.

3



Apply antibacterial soap to the washcloth.

Apply from chin to toes, avoiding face and groin area.

4



Leave on 60 seconds and rinse.