



Preventing and Treating Surgical Site Infections

Fast Facts about Surgical Site Infections (“SSIs”)

- SSIs are infections that occur after surgery at the part of the body where the surgery was performed.
- There are two types of SSIs:
 - Superficial – Infections in the outside skin only.
 - Deep-tissue – More serious infections involving organs or implants (metal rods, screws, plates).

Symptoms of SSIs

- Pain and redness around the surgical site.
- Warmth or swelling around the affected area.
- Drainage of cloudy, sometimes thick fluid from the wound.
- Yellow crust or pimple forms on the wound.
- Fever or chills.

Treatment for SSIs

- Make an appointment to see your doctor right away if you have symptoms of a surgical site infection.
- Treatment of SSIs depends on the type and seriousness of the infection.
- Superficial SSIs are usually treated with antibiotics.
 - Antibiotics are medicines prescribed by your doctor.
 - They are either taken orally (by mouth) or through an IV (small tube in a vein).
- Deep-tissue SSIs are more serious than superficial SSIs and antibiotics may not be enough to treat them.
 - You may need to go to the hospital to have your wound cleaned out. This is called “wound debridement.”
 - Rarely, if you had metal implants put in during surgery, these may have to be removed if a deep-tissue infection becomes too serious.

Antibiotic Resistance

- Antibiotics successfully treat most infections caused by bacteria.
- More recently, some bacteria are becoming resistant to the drugs we use, meaning they are not killed by the drugs.
- Resistant bacteria are a problem because they can create infections that we cannot treat.
- The best way for you to help prevent antibiotic resistant is to take all of the pills or doses of antibiotics that you are prescribed.
 - You may start to feel better before you are finished taking all of the pills or doses, but do not stop taking them until they are completely gone.

Preventing SSIs

Before surgery:

- Take a shower the night before the surgery. Make sure to wash under the arms and the groin area very well.
- If you were given special wipes (“CHG wipes”) to clean the surgery area before surgery, use them the night before. Use them according to the instructions you were given.
- Do not shave the area where you will have surgery. If there is hair that needs to be removed, your doctors and nurses will use special clippers in the operating room.
- You might receive antibiotics through your IV during surgery. This is used to prevent infection while you are in the operating room.

After surgery:

- Patients and caregivers should clean their hands often.
 - Wash your hands before and after caring for your wound.
- Ask questions and find out how to take care of your wound before you leave the hospital.
- If you were given antibiotics at the hospital, take them as prescribed.
- Call your doctor at the first symptoms of an infection.

Hand Hygiene

- When we touch things like doorknobs, toys, and telephones we get germs on our hands.
- After surgery, good hand hygiene is one of the best ways to help prevent an infection in your wound:
 - 1) WET: Wet your hands with warm running water.
 - 2) SOAP: Put enough soap in the palm of your hand to get a lot of bubbles.
 - 3) WASH: Wash your hands by rubbing them together for 15-20 seconds. Don’t forget to wash between your fingers and under fingernails.
 - 4) RINSE: Rinse your hands with running water.
 - 5) DRY: Dry your hands with a paper towel and use the towel to turn off the faucet.
- If you do not have access to soap and water and need to clean your hands, use alcohol-based hand gel or foam.
 - Do not use alcohol hand gel or foam if you see dirt on your hands, after touching uncooked meat or after using the bathroom or changing a diaper.



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Caring for Wound Dressings

- Change the wound dressing if it gets wet or soiled.
 - For example, if you have a wound on your back and you lay on your back for long periods of time, you might sweat causing your dressing to get wet.
- Do not take the wound dressing off until you are told it is time to do so.
 - You might have small, white strips of bandage covering your wound underneath the larger dressing on top. These are called “Steri-Strips.”
 - Steri-Strips are used to help a wound stay closed as it heals. Do not peel these off – they will fall off on their own.
- Do not take a shower until your doctor tells you it is OK to do so.

Helpful Tips

- If you have staples or sutures closing your wound you need to go to your doctor’s office to have these removed.
 - Never try to remove staples or sutures yourself.
- Do not scratch or pick at scabs. Scabs help protect your wound and removing them will expose (open) your wound to germs.
- Most importantly, call your doctor if you have any symptoms of an infection after your surgery.

Sources for More Information

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Handwashing**
<http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Surgical Site Infections**
http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/ssi/faq_ssi.html
- **American Academy of Pediatrics: Wound Infections**
<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/tips-tools/Symptom-Checker/Pages/Wound-Infection.aspx>
- **American Academy of Pediatrics: How Antibiotics Work**
<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/treatments/Pages/How-Do-Antibiotics-Work.aspx>

Our orthopaedic providers can help answer more questions about caring for surgical sites and preventing infections.

Call our office at (404) 321-9900 for an appointment!