

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Surgical Site Infections (SSIs)

## What is a surgical site infection?

A surgical site infection is an infection that happens after surgery in the part of the body where the surgery took place. Most patients who have surgery do not develop an infection. However, infections develop in about 1 to 3 out of every 100 patients who have surgery.

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

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

## Can surgical site infections be treated?

Yes. Most surgical site infections can be treated with antibiotics. The antibiotic given to you depends on the bacteria (germs) causing the infection. Sometimes patients with surgical site infections also need another surgery to treat the infection.

## What are some of the things that hospitals are 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 the surgery.
- Clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for each patient.

- May remove some of your hair right before your surgery using electric clippers if the hair is in the same area where the surgery will take place.
  - They should **not** shave you with a razor.
- Give you an antiseptic wash before surgery to lower the number of germs on your skin.
- Wear special hair covers, masks, gowns, and gloves during surgery to keep the surgery area clean.
- Give you antibiotics before your surgery starts. In most cases, you should get antibiotics within 60 minutes before the surgery starts and the antibiotics should be stopped within 24 hours after surgery.
- Clean the skin at the site of your surgery with a special soap that kills germs.

## What can I do to help prevent surgical site infections?

### 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 how you can quit before your surgery.
- Do **not** shave near where you will have surgery. Shaving with a razor can irritate your skin and make it easier to develop an infection.
- Make sure that you have clean linens in place at home (fresh sheets and towels).

### At the time of your 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 if you will get antibiotics before surgery.

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### After your surgery:

- Make sure that your healthcare providers clean their hands before examining you, either with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
  - If you do not see your providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.
- 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 clean their hands.**

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

- 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.
- Always clean your hands before and after caring for your wound.
- Do **not** let pets near your surgical incision.
- Make sure you know who to call if you have questions or problems after you get home.
- If you have any symptoms of an infection, such as redness and pain at the surgery site, drainage, or fever, call your doctor right away.
- Ask your doctor or nurse if you have any other questions.

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