

Making Surgery Safer & Preventing Infections

The majority of patients who undergo surgery do well. However, infections arise in about three percent of surgery patients. Most often, infections begin from the patient's own skin organisms. Prevention of infections is important. Post-surgery infections may lead to serious problems ranging from longer hospital stays and other health issues to, in rare instances, death.

Before Surgery

-Consult your physician about any remote infections and clear up any dental issues prior to surgery.

A week or a few days before surgery

-Pre-admit with the hospital.

-Provide an updated list of all medications you are currently taking.

-Talk to the pre-admitting nurse about any concerns and previous surgical complications.

-It is important to have surgery when you are free of infection, if possible. Tell the pre-admit nurse if you are feeling sick, running fever, not feeling well or if you are having medical complications so they may communicate with the physician.

The day or night before surgery

-Take extra special care of your body and surgical site.

-Do not shave your surgical site the day or night before surgery. Shaving can irritate your skin and open your body to infection and increase your risk of infection.

-Take a bath or shower with the solution given to you by your physician, or with antibacterial soap, both the night before and morning of your surgery. The solution decreases the amount of bacteria on your skin.

-Keep warm. Staying warm encourages better blood flow to your surgical site and lowers your chance of infection. Wear warm clothes or use blankets when you go to the hospital. If it is cold outside, heat up your car before you leave for the hospital.

-Brush your teeth and clean your mouth well. Intubation (insertion of tubes) may be required for your surgery and poor oral hygiene can increase your risk of a respiratory infection.

The day of surgery

-Inform the anesthesiologist (doctor or nurse who puts you to sleep before surgery) of all medications you are currently taking. Also inform them of any previous problems with surgical procedures or anesthesia.

-The anesthesiologist should also know if you have diabetes, high blood pressure or heart conditions. The likelihood of post-surgery infection is greater for diabetics.

-It is important to the hospital staff to make sure everything is correct before your surgery. You will be asked your name, what kind of surgery you are having, and where you are having surgery (which part of your body, right or left) several times before your procedure.

-Stay warm. Ask the staff for blankets if you are cold and ask how you will be kept warm during and after surgery.

After surgery

-The more you are able to walk after your procedure, the quicker you will be able to recover normally. To help reduce the risk of blood clots, the hospital staff may place tight stockings on your legs and pumps on your feet while you are lying in bed during recovery.

-It is very important for all the healthcare professionals treating you to wash their hands. Visitors also need to clean their hands.

-Notify your nurse as soon as possible if your surgical bandage becomes dirty, or if blood begins to leak through.

-During surgery, many patients will have a tube or catheter inserted to help drain their bladder. After surgery, ask when the catheter may be removed. The risk of infection increases each day the catheter is in your bladder.

-It is also important to drink plenty of fluids after surgery and when allowed. Fluids help prevent infections by flushing your bladder.

After discharge from the hospital

-Be sure you receive discharge instructions from your physician.

-Bathe or shower daily after your physician has cleared you to do so.

-Keep your surgical site clean and dry and follow instructions carefully when changing your bandage.

-Wear clean, dry clothes over your surgical site to prevent contamination.

-Contact your physician immediately if you are experiencing signs of infection: a fever of 100.6 or more, surgical site drainage, bleeding, swelling, new redness, or heat.



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