

## Preventing Infections After Surgery

### What are surgical site infections (SSIs)?

Surgical site infections (SSIs) may occur after having surgery. The SSI can be at the skin or it can be deep in the part of the body where surgery occurred. Most patients who have surgery do not get an SSI.

### What are symptoms of SSIs?

- Pain or tenderness at surgical site
- Swelling
- Redness
- Fever
- Increased drainage or cloudy drainage from incision

### Can SSIs be treated?

Yes. Most SSIs can be treated with antibiotics. Sometimes patients with SSIs also need another surgery to treat the SSI.

### What does UW Health do to prevent SSIs?

- We clean our hands and arms with an antiseptic agent before surgery.
- We clean our hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for each patient.
- We may remove some of your hair right before your surgery using a clipper, not a razor.
- We make sure you clean your skin with a special soap (Hibiclens®) that kills germs the night before and the day of surgery.
- We may test your nose to find out if you carry bacteria called *S. aureus* or MRSA, which can cause SSIs.
- We may apply an antiseptic in your nose right before your surgery to kill nasal germs that cause SSIs.

- We wear special hair covers, masks, gowns, and gloves during surgery to keep the site clean.
- We may give an antibiotic before your surgery starts. In most cases, you will get it within 1 hour of the start of surgery and will be stopped 24 hours after surgery.
- May give you a gown that connects to a warm air blower. Keeping you warm prior to and during surgery helps prevent SSIs.

### What can I do to help prevent SSIs?

#### Before Your Surgery

Tell your doctor about other health problems you may have. Let your doctor know if you had an SSI after a prior surgery or any other bad infection. Health problems such as diabetes, allergies, and obesity could affect your surgery and treatment. If you have diabetes, check and make every effort to control your blood sugar.

Quit smoking. Patients who smoke get more infections. Talk to your doctor about how you can quit before your surgery.

#### During Your Surgery and Hospital Stay

Make sure that healthcare workers wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub before they touch you. If you do not see them wash their hands, ask them to do so.

Family and friends should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after they visit. If you do not see them clean their hands, ask them to do so. They should not touch your wound or dressing.

Keep your dressing clean, dry, and intact. Do not remove the dressing to show others your wound.

Expect that staff will be cleaning your wound and changing the dressing at least daily. Please inform staff if your dressing is soiled and needs to be changed.

Before you go home, your doctor or nurse should explain how to take care of your wound. Make sure you know how to care for your wound before you go home.

You will take the Hibiclens<sup>®</sup> soap home with you to clean your wound. After cleaning the incision with Hibiclens<sup>®</sup> be sure to rinse the soap off your skin with water and apply a clean dressing.

### **After You Go Home**

Always clean your hands before and after caring for your wound.

Keep yourself and everything around you as clean as you can. Please use clean bed linens, wear clean clothing, and use disinfectants to clean surfaces such as bathroom fixtures. Please do not allow pets to be on your bed while you are healing.

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.

### **References**

FAQs about “Surgical Site Infections”. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<https://www.cdc.gov/patientsafety/features/before-surgery.html>

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 6/2021 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7217.