

## Splenectomy

### About the Spleen

The spleen is an organ in your abdomen. It is often injured in accidents but may need to be removed for many other reasons. Your spleen works as a filter for your blood. It is a vital part of your immune system. If your spleen has severe damage, it may be harmful to your health. A spleen that is injured can bleed into the abdomen. This may cause life-threatening blood loss or infection. It may also cause damage to your pancreas.

### The Day Before Surgery

You may need to take a laxative to prepare for surgery. We will discuss the details with you.

### After Surgery

#### Diet

You and the health care team will discuss when you can eat. You may start slowly with clear liquids (like juice, Jello<sup>®</sup>, broth, popsicles, etc), but should be able to eat real food in a few days.

When you start eating, go slowly and only eat what feels and tastes good. If you begin to feel sick or full, you should stop eating. Someone from your health care team will let you know when your diet has been changed.

#### Pain

It is normal to have some pain. You may be taking opioid pain medicine for pain control. Opioids are a strong pain medicine. You should only take them when you are in moderate to severe pain. Not everyone requires opioids for pain control. Most people will only need to take a non-opioid pain medicine such as acetaminophen

(Tylenol<sup>®</sup>). You may have aching in your neck and shoulders from the gas put into your abdomen. Using a heating pad and/or walking may help relieve this pain better than medicine.

### Wound Care

Keep your incisions dry for 48 hours (2 days). You may shower when your surgical team says it okay (about 3-5 days). You may have some bruising at your incision sites.

Check your wounds daily and report problems such as:

- Increased redness, swelling or warmth.
- Drainage such as blood or pus.
- Fever (by mouth) above 100.4° F for two readings taken 4 hours apart.
- Excess bruising.

### Activity

- Walking is good exercise for you after surgery. Do not do any other exercise until you talk with your doctor.
- No driving while taking opioid pain pills.
- You will have a limit on how much you can lift. We will discuss the details with you.
- Check with your doctor before you return to work.
- Sex may be resumed when you feel ready.
- Avoid all tobacco and second-hand smoke.

## Infection Prevention

Having your spleen removed does not make it more likely that you'll get the flu, common cold, or other viral infections. Yet, having your spleen removed may increase the chances of serious illness or even death if you get certain types of infections. Although this is rare, if it does happen, it can be very serious.

Before surgery or after you go home, we urge you to get the vaccines listed below. Some of these vaccines have booster doses that are due after the first doses. You should see your doctor about 2 months after going home to get your booster doses.

- Pneumovax<sup>®</sup> (pneumococcal polysaccharide 23 valent)
- Prevnar<sup>®</sup> (pneumococcal conjugate 13 valent)
- Menveo<sup>®</sup> (meningococcal group A conjugate with serogroup A, C, Y, W-135)
- Bexsero<sup>®</sup> (meningococcal group B vaccine)
- Haemophilus Type B vaccine "Hib"
- The annual flu (influenza) shot

## Other Steps to Prevent Infection

You will need to carry antibiotics with you when you travel to places that may not have quick access to health care. Consult with your primary care doctor on this.

If you are going to travel to a place where malaria is common, you will **always** need to take medicine to prevent malaria.

Avoid bites and scratches from dogs or cats and protect yourself from ticks. The germs that dogs, cats, and ticks carry can cause a serious infection after a splenectomy. See a doctor if you get a dog, cat, or tick bite.

You should wear a MedicAlert bracelet or necklace and carry a wallet card stating you have no spleen. Inform all new health care teams and your dentist that your spleen was removed.

MedicAlert Foundation  
2323 Colorado Ave.  
Turlock, CA 95382  
**800-432-5378**  
[www.medicalert.org](http://www.medicalert.org)

## When to Call

If you have any of these symptoms, get help right away.

- Fever of 100.4° F or greater for two readings taken by mouth, 4 hours apart
- Flu-like symptoms such as chills, rigors (out of control shivering) and/or body aches
- Cough or shortness of breath
- Problems eating or drinking
- Increased swelling of the abdomen
- Nausea or vomiting that does not go away
- Increased redness, pain, bleeding or pus at the incisions
- Pain not controlled by pain pills
- No bowel movement within 3 days of surgery, you may need a laxative

## Who to Call

**Surgery Clinic: (608) 263-7502.** This is a 24-hour number.

**After hours, weekends and holidays** ask for the doctor on call for Dr.\_\_\_\_\_. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

**Toll-Free: 1 800-323-8942**

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

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 © 11/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#4313.