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 and makes blood cells that help you fight infection. 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. If your spleen is removed, other organs help take over the spleen's functions.

The Day Before Surgery
You may need to take a laxative to prepare for surgery. We will discuss the details with you. Your surgery team will tell you how long before surgery to stop eating and drinking. The surgery team will let you know if there are any medications you are taking that need to be stopped or any new medications that need to be added.

After Surgery

Diet
You and the health care team will discuss when you can eat. You may start slowly with clear liquids (like juice, Jell-O®, broth, popsicles, etc.). If you are feeling well, you should be able to eat solid food within 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 healthcare 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. Most people will only need to take a non-opioid pain medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®). 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. Use of pain medication should decrease as time goes on from surgery.

Wound Care
Keep your incisions dry for 48 hours (2 days). You may shower when your surgical team says it is okay (about 3-5 days). Use mild soap (or approved antimicrobial soap) and water to keep your incisions clean. You may have some bruising at your incision sites.

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.

Vaccines can help reduce the risk of serious disease or death from pneumonia, influenza type b, and meningitis infections. Ask your provider or pharmacist which vaccines are right for you.

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

When to Call
If you have any of the symptoms below, get help right away.

- Fever of 100.4º 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 in 3 days.
- Severe or unusual headache.
- Drowsiness, confusion, or disorientation.
- Feeling like your heart is racing.
- Sudden swelling, pain, and redness in any extremity.

Who to Call
If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan.

For a list of UW Health Clinics, please visit www.uwhealth.org/.

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 © 11/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#4313.