



FAQs: Infections after Surgery

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions - Infections after Surgery

A surgical site infection is an infection that occurs after surgery in the part of the body where the surgery or procedure was done. Most patients who have surgery do not develop an infection. Antibiotics are often used during surgery because this has been effective at avoiding infections in most cases. Rarely are antibiotics needed after surgery.

What are common signs and symptoms of infection?

1. Worsening/increasing redness and pain around the area where you had surgery
2. Drainage of cloudy, thick, yellowish fluid (pus) from your surgical incision
3. A general "ill or bad" feeling, different from your usual state
4. Fever may be a symptom of infection

What can I do to help prevent an infection after surgery?

1. Keep your hands clean – wash after using the restroom, before and after food preparation, when handling children or pets, or when touching others or objects such as door handles, phones, etc.
2. Keep your incision and bandage clean – change the bandage when it is dirty or every day, generally. Wash the wound with soap and water, lightly, unless directed not to by the doctor.
3. Limit or avoid touching your incision and bandage - don't fiddle with it. Touch it only when cleaning and changing the bandage.
4. If you need to touch the area around your incision or bandage, clean your hands before and afterward.
5. Do not let people other than your caregiver touch your incision or bandage.

What do I need to do when I go home from surgery?

1. Make sure you understand how to care for your incision and bandage before you leave the hospital or clinic – the nurse will explain basic care for your incision(s) and directions will be on your surgical information paperwork. Please ask if you are unsure.
2. Look at (inspect) your incisional area and bandage at least once a day and note any changes. Look for redness, drainage, or other features that might be different from day to day.
3. Do not put lotion or ointment directly on your incision before talking with your doctor.
4. Sleep in clean clothes and bed sheets and **please don't share your bed with your pet.**



5. Shower or sponge bath daily. Do not soak in hot tubs or pools until your surgical team allows it.
6. Keep pets away from your incision and bandage. They are curious, but dirty.
7. If you have increasing redness and pain in the area of your surgery, call your doctor immediately.

What can I do to help my incision heal?

1. Eat nutritious foods. For example, protein, fruits and vegetables. Provide your body with what it needs to heal.
2. Drink fluids – preferably water, but fluids in general are needed for optimal healing.
3. Get plenty of rest – sleep is critical for healing. Look up sleep hygiene online and implement some good practices in your nightly routine.
4. Walk/mobilize several times a day. Gradually increase the distance you walk.

Can surgical site infections be treated?

1. Yes. Treatment may be an antibiotic, or a topical ointment. Sometimes special incision care, a wound clinic, or surgery is needed. It is important to call your doctor to best treat infections.