

Surgical Site Infections (SSI):

What You Need to Know

Surgical site infection (SSI) is an infection that occurs in the same area where you had surgery.

- It is diagnosed through a blood test or wound tissue sampling.
- The risks for getting SSI's will always be present. However, you can decrease these risks.
- You can often prevent surgical site infections.

What increases the risk?

- Dirty skin
- Not cleaning the skin with soap and water or other cleansers before surgery
- Dirty physical environment (room, bed, tables, clothes, and anything that surrounds you)
- Having diabetes
- Having an existing infection
- Being a smoker
- Being an elderly adult

Why do we want to prevent a surgical site infection?

- To prevent unnecessary hospital readmissions
- These infections may spread all through your body
- Infections slow down your healing
- It may cause long-term disabilities such as amputations, nerve damage, and organ damage if left untreated

Signs and symptoms:

- Redness and swelling
- Fever (101.0 °F)
- Milky or yellow liquid coming out of the surgery wound
- Bad odor
- Painful wound
- Incision that is warm to touch

What to expect after surgery

- As anesthesia wears off, pain may increase
- Depending on the surgery, you may have some blood at the incision

What NOT to expect

- Nonstop bleeding
- Being completely pain-free
- New onset of numbness
- Opening incisions
- Constant severe pain
- Blisters

Name:

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What can be done to prevent surgical site infections?

- ALWAYS make sure that visitors, including family members, doctors, and nurses, wash their hands before physical contact with you. They must use soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Clean your hands regularly. Especially before eating, after using the toilet (bathroom), and before touching and/or cleaning the surgery incision.
- A full body bath is strongly recommended before surgery.
- Do not remove wound dressings without talking to your nurse or doctor. You should have the first dressing in place for at least 48 hours.
- Your doctor may order antibiotic(s) before surgery.
- Know about the signs and symptoms of a surgical site infection. If you have any signs or symptoms, tell a healthcare worker.
- Keep the dressing clean and dry.
- Do not smoke.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Diabetics should test/check their blood sugar 3 to 4 times a day (or as told by their doctor)
- Do not allow pet animals to sleep with you on your bed.
- Make sure that your nurse or doctor explains to you how to take care of the incision.

Things you need to know or should discuss before you go home with your nurse or doctor:

- How to clean the surgical incision and put on dressings/bandages
- Follow-up appointments needed
- Who to contact for questions
- Getting supplies for dressing changes

What to do if you notice signs and symptoms of infection

- Do not ignore them
- Tell your doctor
- Go to a hospital emergency room or visit a health clinic if seen after discharge

References:

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