

Q. Should my surgeon tell me his or her surgical site infection rate?

A: Yes, your surgeon and hospital have infection rates by the type of surgery. It is important for you to discuss infection rates with your surgeon before you sign the informed consent. To learn more about surgical site infection rates for your procedure, go to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (www.cdc.gov) and click on the National Nosocomial Infection Surveillance (NNIS) link.



Protect Yourself

What To Do Before..... A Consumer's Guide to Surgical Site Wounds

It's a Fact!

Surgical site infections are a major reason why some patients spend extra time in the hospital. Infections are not only costly in terms of dollars, they can be deadly as well..... Not all types of wounds are likely to develop an infection, but others are. Safe, proper conditions are necessary to reduce the number of surgical site infections. Patients can be taught how to properly take care of surgical wounds.....



Q. What is a surgical wound?

A: Any wound resulting from a procedure where your skin is cut or punctured to carry out a procedure. Surgical site infections result from both treatment and diagnostic procedures (for example, a hernia repair or a biopsy of a lymph node). Surgical wounds may be closed with bandages, sutures or staples depending on the type of wound and the preferences of your surgeon.

Q. How should I care for my surgical wound after I leave the hospital?

A: In most cases you should have someone check your wound on a daily basis. If necessary, you can arrange for a nursing visit through your hospital's home health services. Your doctor or nurse will give instructions on how to care for your specific type of surgical wound. However, you should take steps to protect your wound from coming into contact with anything that might allow germs to get into the wound and cause infection. When in doubt as to what to do, call your doctor or nurse for further instructions.

Q. What type of complications can develop from surgical wounds?

A: You want to look for any redness, swelling or drainage from the wound. Some degree of swelling is normal because your skin has undergone trauma and your blood vessels has been damaged. You might notice what is called a hematoma (accumulation of blood that is collected after a wound is closed). Hematoma is another word for a bruise. In most cases, your body will absorb the extra blood without any problem. However, if the swelling does not go down in a few days, you may need to have it drained in the hospital. You may also be concerned if the wound becomes red, there is drainage, or you feel pain. Contact your surgeon or nurse immediately and let them know that something might be wrong.

Q. Why do infections develop at surgical wounds?

A: Because your skin, which is your largest organ and ordinarily protects you from germs, is now open to the environment and all the germs around you.

Open wounds are the way germs get in your tissue, multiply and cause infection. The first 48 hours following your surgery are the most critical because your wound has not yet begun to heal.

Q. What can be done to prevent infections at surgical wounds?

A: Wounds must be properly cared for and this begins before you have your procedure. Preventing infection begins before you have your surgery. Make sure all your doctors know about any chronic condition such as diabetes or urinary tract infections. You may be asked to bathe with an antiseptic before you come to the hospital. Your doctor may order antibiotics before your surgery. After surgery make sure that whenever the bandage is changed or the wound cleaned, that the nurse washes his or her hands and wears gloves. Also, remind your doctor or nurse not to place clean bandages on surfaces that have not been disinfected. Failure to follow strict sterile guidelines could result in a contaminated bandage being placed on your open wound.

