



How You Can Help Prevent Surgical Site Infections

Information for Patients and Family Members

What Is a Surgical Site Infection?

A surgical site infection is an infection of the cut or other part of your body involved in your surgery. Even though most people do well after surgery, some may get an infection.

How Can I Help Reduce My Risk of Getting a Surgical Site Infection?

Before the Surgery

- If you are told to take a special shower before surgery, make sure to follow the instructions in this handout.
- If you are told to take antibiotics before surgery, take them as directed.
- Stop tobacco use before your surgery. Call our Healthy Living Helpline at 1-866-402-4320 to speak with a lifestyle coach who can give you strategies and resources to help you quit smoking.
- If you have diabetes, watching your blood sugar levels, following your meal plan, keeping physically active, and taking diabetes medications as prescribed will help you manage your blood sugar before surgery.
- If you have a cough, severe cold, or the flu a week before your surgery is scheduled, call and let your surgeon know.

General Instructions Before Your Surgery

Preparing or “prepping” your skin helps reduce the normal bacteria on your skin that may be a potential source of infection where you have your surgery. Before you have your surgery, it is important to prep your skin. You must use either:

- A special soap containing chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) or
- Disposable cloths moistened with a rinse-free 2% CHG antiseptic solution (CHG prep cloths)

Before your surgery it is important to follow these instructions carefully:

- **Do not** shave any areas of your body, including your chest, legs, and underarms on the day of your surgery or for two days before. It is okay to shave your face.
- **Do not** use any other soap or body rinse on your skin after using the CHG product.
- **Do not** use lotion, powder, deodorant, perfume, or aftershave of any kind on your skin after using the CHG product.

The admitting nurse will ask if you have bathed or used the cloths following these instructions.

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Instructions for Using CHG Prep Cloths

The Night Before Your Surgery

- Remove any body piercing jewelry before you shower and leave it out until after your surgery.
- Shower or bathe.
- **Wait at least one hour** and then use two CHG prep cloth packages as directed. Use one new cloth for each of the four body areas mentioned. Vigorously scrub back and forth on the skin in each area for three minutes. **Avoid touching the cloths to your eyes, ears, and mouth.**
 - **Cloth 1:** Wipe your neck, chest, and both arms. Start each arm with the shoulder and end at the fingertips. **Be sure to thoroughly wipe the armpit areas.**
 - **Cloth 2:** Wipe your abdomen (stomach), your right and left hip, and then your groin. **Be sure to wipe the folds in your abdominal and groin areas.**
 - **Cloth 3:** Wipe both legs, starting at the thigh and ending at the toes. **Be sure to thoroughly wipe behind your knees.**
 - **Cloth 4:** Wipe your back starting at the base of your neck and ending at your waistline. Cover as much of your back as possible. Ask for help if you need it. End by wiping your buttocks.
- Throw the cloths away in the trash.

The Morning of Surgery

- **Do not shower, bathe, or shampoo your hair.**
- Use a third prep cloth package the morning of surgery. Repeat the steps above with the remaining two cloths, using one cloth to clean areas 1 and 2, and the other to clean areas 3 and 4. Allow your skin to dry.
- Throw the cloths away in the trash.

Instructions for Using CHG soap The Night Before Your Surgery

- Remove any body piercing jewelry before you shower and leave it out until after your surgery.
- You may wash your hair with regular shampoo. Rinse your hair thoroughly **before** using the CHG soap on your body. Do not use CHG to shampoo your hair, as it should not get into your ears or eyes.
- Shower using the CHG soap.
- Wet your entire body with water, and then turn the water off while cleaning yourself with the CHG soap.
- Use a clean washcloth to apply the soap unless you were given a special brush/sponge that has the soap inside it. If you use the special brush/sponge, use the sponge side only. The brush side may scratch your skin.
- **Wash your body from the neck down to your toes with the soap.** It works, even though it doesn't lather (make suds) well.
- Be sure to clean the area where your surgical incision (cut) will be well.
- Rinse thoroughly with running water.
- Pat yourself dry with a clean, absorbent towel.

In the Hospital and After-Care

We are committed to preventing infections.

- Avoid touching your wound. If you need to, wash your hands before and after you touch it.
- Expect our staff members to clean their hands before giving you care. Remind them to clean their hands if they forget.
- Make sure your visitors read and follow all instructions posted outside your room.
- Make sure your visitors do not touch anything used for your care.