

Preventing Infection After Surgery

After surgery, you are not at full strength. Your body needs time to heal and repair itself. When you are in this weakened state, your risk of developing an infection increases. And an infection can complicate your recovery and put your overall health at risk.

You could develop an infection from the spread of germs. And germs are everywhere, from a cough or sneeze traveling through the air, on the surfaces you touch, even in the hospital.

The best way to prevent the spread of germs is to wash your hands often - before and after you eat, after you use the restroom, before you leave your room and when you come back, before and after touching any of your bandages and dressings, and after you come in contact with another person.

Use soap and warm, running water. Vigorously scrub all surfaces, including your palms, the backs of your hands, between your fingers, your thumbs, and on your fingertips and under your nails. Scrub for at least 15 to 20 seconds every time.

If soap and water are not available, you can still wash your hands. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer can actually kill the germs it comes in contact with. But if your hands are dirty, the alcohol cannot reach the germs. So, if you can see dirt on your hands, it is better to use soap and water.

Visitors and hospital staff may carry germs with them as well. Protect yourself. Speak up and remind them to wash their hands each time they come into your room and each time they leave.

In order to protect against germs, your bandages need to be changed on a regular basis and the surgical site needs to be cleansed properly. If you notice your bandages are wet, dirty, or are starting to come off, let hospital staff know so they can change them.

And when hospital staff change your dressings or bandages, make sure they wash their hands before and after treating you and that they are wearing proper protective equipment, like gloves.

Tubes and catheters can increase your risk of developing an infection. The longer they are in your body, the more at risk you are. Talk to your healthcare provider about removing the tube or catheter as soon as possible. While it is in, make sure you follow your healthcare provider's instructions to keep it clean and sanitized.

While you recover, watch for signs of infection, including fatigue - you may feel more and more tired each day, instead of steadily getting better, a fever of 100.4 or higher, chills, vomiting, or diarrhea.

At the surgical site, you may notice the area feels hot and may be red, the area smells foul, increased swelling around the incision area, tenderness and soreness, and drainage from the wound site. If you do notice any of these signs of infection, tell your healthcare provider right away. The faster your infection is treated, the faster you can get back on the road to recovery.

Pneumonia is another type of infection that you may be at an increased risk of after surgery. Pneumonia is a build-up of fluid in the lungs and can be serious. To strengthen your lungs and prevent pneumonia, your healthcare provider will prescribe specific breathing exercises called incentive spirometry and controlled coughing.

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Perform these exercises as directed but expect to do them about ten times each hour. If you feel pain while doing your breathing exercises, talk to your healthcare provider about proper pain management to help you reach your controlled coughing goals.

Doing your breathing exercises as directed can help clear your lungs of excess fluids, helping you breathe easier, feel better and prevent infection.