



Preventing Wound Infections After Surgery

What is a wound infection?

A wound infection is an infection that occurs after surgery in the part of the body where the surgery took place. Most patients who have surgery do not develop an infection. Some of the symptoms of a wound infection are:

- Redness and pain around the area where you had surgery
- Drainage of cloudy fluid coming from the wound
- Fever



Can wound infections be treated?

Yes, most wound infections can be treated with antibiotics. Some patients may need additional surgery to treat the infection.

What is MGH doing to prevent this type of infection?

At MGH, we:

- Clean our hands and arms with an antimicrobial soap (one that kills germs) just before the surgery.
- Clean our hands before and after caring for each patient.
- May remove hair in the area of the procedure just before your surgery using electric clippers.
- Follow sterile procedures during surgery to keep the area clean.
- When recommended, give you antibiotics just before your surgery starts; and then stop antibiotics 24 hours after surgery.
- Clean the skin in the area of the procedure with an antimicrobial soap just before the surgery.

How can I help prevent a wound infection?

Before your surgery:

- Tell your doctor about other medical problems you may have, such as allergies or diabetes.
- Try to stop smoking. Patients who smoke get more infections. Talk to your doctor about how you can quit before surgery.
- Do not shave near where you will have surgery. Shaving with a razor can irritate your skin and make it easier to develop an infection.
- Shower or bathe with an antimicrobial soap the evening before surgery. Any soap marked “antimicrobial” is fine.
- You may receive specific instructions on bathing from your doctor, such as using a certain kind of soap.

After your surgery

- Visitors should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol hand rub before and after visiting you. They should not touch your wound or bandage.
- Before you go home, your doctor or nurse will explain how to care for your wound. Ask your doctor or nurse if you have questions.