

## **What is a surgical site infection?**

There are many tiny organisms (called micro-organisms) living on your skin, in your body and in the environment around you. Most micro-organisms do not cause you any harm. When you have an operation, micro-organisms from your own body or from the environment can enter the body through the cut made by the surgeon (known as a surgical wound). They can multiply and cause an infection. This is called a surgical site infection (SSI). Many surgical site infections are not very serious, affecting only the skin.

However, some can be more serious if they affect the deeper tissues under the skin. Surgical site infections can often be prevented if care is taken before, during and after surgery.

## **What can you do to prevent a SSI?**

Before your operation:

- if you are diabetic, keep your blood sugar within the normal recommended limits
- stop smoking at least four weeks before your surgery
- eat a healthy nutritional diet before and after surgery as this is important for wound healing
- you should wash your hair and take a shower the morning of your surgery. You may have been given a special soap from your pre-admission appointment
- bring in a warm dressing gown to wear before going to theatre it is important you are not cold before your operation.

After the operation:

- if you are given antibiotics, make sure you take the course as instructed.
- please avoid touching your wound or dressing until it is healed unless you have washed your hands

- if any staff come to look at or change your wound dressing, it is crucial that they wash or gel their hands before and after touching it. It is ok to ask, 'Have you washed your hands?'
- tell your nurse or doctor if you think your wound is becoming more sore or hot, if you notice it oozing or if you start to feel more unwell
- please ask your visitors not to come in if they are unwell or have an infection themselves.

## **What can we do to prevent an SSI?**

Before your operation:

- swabs to check for MRSA may be taken. If found to be positive, you will be started on a course of treatment before your operation
- you will be given a blanket/duvet to keep you warm while on the ward
- before an operation starts, the skin area is cleaned with antiseptic and sterile sheets are used to protect the operating area.
- antibiotics may be given to you at the same time as you are given your anaesthetic and possibly afterwards.

## **During your operation**

The team carrying out your operation will take special precautions to help prevent your wound from becoming infected. These include:

- thoroughly washing their hands and cleaning their nails
- wearing surgical gowns and gloves that are sterile

To reduce the risk of infection your healthcare team will make sure that:

- you are receiving enough oxygen
- the fluid balance in your body is correct

- your body stays at the correct temperature
- at the end of the operation your surgical wound will be covered with a dressing to help it heal and protect it for infection.

### After your operation

Your healthcare team should take special care when changing or removing your wound dressing to prevent infection. A nurse will check your wound every shift.

### Comments, compliments or complaints about your care

Please raise any concerns in the ward or department you are in. Ask to speak with the ward sister, matron or department manager. If your concerns cannot be resolved or you wish to make a formal complaint, please call PALS (Patient Advice & Liaison Service) on 0800 783 7328, pick up a PALS leaflet or visit [www.colchesterhospital.nhs.uk/pals.shtml](http://www.colchesterhospital.nhs.uk/pals.shtml)

### Your views

If you or a family member has recently been in Colchester General Hospital, you can tell us about your experience by searching for 'Colchester' on the NHS Choices website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)), by writing to the address on the front of this leaflet, by emailing your comments to [info@colchesterhospital.nhs.uk](mailto:info@colchesterhospital.nhs.uk) or by filling in a 'Friends and Family' questionnaire at the hospital.

## How to prevent Surgical Site Infections (wound infections)

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