



Davis Spine & Orthopaedics

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Board Certified and Fellowship Trained

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How to Prevent a Surgical Site Infection (SSI)

What is a surgical site infection (SSI)?

A surgical site infection is one that occurs after surgery and in the part of the body where the surgery took place. Most patients who have surgery do not develop an infection; however, infections can occur in about 1 to 3 out of every 100 surgical patients. Some of the common symptoms of an SSI are:

- redness and pain around the area where you had surgery
- drainage of cloudy fluid from the surgical wound
- fever greater than 101.5°F

Can surgical site infections be treated?

Yes. Most SSIs can be treated with antibiotics. If you recently underwent a spinal procedure, it is likely another surgery would be necessary to identify the bacteria (germ) for appropriate treatment. The antibiotic given to you depends on the bacteria causing the infection. Antibiotics may be given by mouth or even through an IV catheter.

What are some of the things that hospitals are doing to prevent surgical site infections?

To prevent SSIs, doctors, nurses, and/or all other healthcare providers:

- Clean their hands and arms up to the elbows with an antiseptic agent just before surgery.
- Clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for you.
- May remove some of your hair immediately before your surgery using electric clippers if your hair is in the same area where the procedure will occur.
- Wear special hair covers, mask, gowns and gloves during surgery to keep the surgical area clean.
- Give you antibiotics before your surgery starts. In most cases, you should get antibiotics within 60 minutes before the surgery starts; the antibiotics should be stopped within 24 hours after surgery.
- Give you Providone-Iodine Nasal Antiseptic. This is a nasal swab which will be done to both nostrils in the preoperative area the morning of surgery. If you are allergic to iodine this will not be used.
- Keep you warm. When a person receives anesthesia they're unable to regulate their body temperature. Studies show that keeping patients warm to a temperature of 96.8°F helps improve outcomes by reducing complications associated with hypothermia. You will be given a down made of soft paper fabric that will allow anesthesiology to regulate body temperature.
- Clean the skin at the site of your surgery with a special wipe that killed in germs.

What can I do to help prevent surgical site infections?

- Maintain well-control of blood sugar levels at least a few weeks before surgery. To achieve good glycemic control you should consult your primary care provider or endocrinologist regarding diabetes management several weeks before your surgery.

- Smoking cessation. Smoking affects your body’s ability to heal bones and wounds. It may also increase your risk for complications after surgery. It is best to quit smoking before your surgery. For more information contact SmokingStopsHere.com or call 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669).
- Following instructions on preoperative bathing and chlorhexidine wipes.
 - Chlorhexidine wipes will be provided at the pre-op visit. They will be used the night before and morning of surgery at home. Instructions are provided when you receive the wipes.
- Do not self-shave near the area in which you will be having surgery. Razors can cause small cuts and nicks to the skin, many of which may be microscopic and not visible to the human eye. This increases the risk of infection. Speak up if someone tries to shave you with a razor before surgery.
- Make sure that your healthcare providers clean their hands before examining you. They may either use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. If you do not see your providers clean their hands, ask them to do so.
- Family and friends who visit you should not touch the surgical wound or dressings. No one should touch or dressing unless they have been trained to do so.
- Family and friends should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after visiting you.

What do I need to know when I will leave the hospital?

- Maintain glucose control.
- Do not smoke or use nicotine products!
- Always clean your hands before and after caring for your wound.
- Make sure you understand how to care for your wound and dressing before you leave the hospital.
 - Your incision should be kept clean and dry. Further instructions can be found in the “Discharge Instructions” provided at your pre-op visit.
- If you have any symptoms of an infection, such as redness and pain at the surgery site, increased drainage, change in smell, or fever, call Davis Spine immediately at 813-994-BACK (2225).