

Resources for Hospital and Surgical Patients

Every day patients receiving medical treatment acquire infections in healthcare facilities. Spending time in a hospital or getting surgery puts patients at risk for healthcare-associated infections (HAI), such as blood, surgical site, or urinary tract infections. These infections can have devastating physical, emotional and financial results. However, there are actions that healthcare consumers and providers can take to reduce HAI. The following ten steps, published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are simple activities that patients and their healthcare providers can follow to reduce the likelihood of acquiring HAIs and improve healthcare safety in general:

1. **Speak up:** Tell your doctor about any worries you have about your safety and ask them what they are doing to protect you.
2. **Keep hands clean:** If you do not see your providers clean their hands, ask them to do so. Also, remind your loved ones and visitors. Washing hands can prevent the spread of germs.
3. **Ask if you still need a central line or urinary catheter:** A central line catheter is a tube inserted into a central vein for giving fluids and medicines and for obtaining diagnostic information to assess your condition and guide your treatment. A urinary catheter is a tube placed in the urethra to drain urine from the bladder into an attached bag or container. It is used in patients undergoing surgery or who are confined to a bed and are physically unable to use a bed pan. Leaving any catheter in place too long increases the chances of getting an infection.
4. **Ask your healthcare provider:** "will there be a new needle, new syringe, and a new vial for this procedure or injection?" Healthcare providers should never reuse needles or syringes on more than one patient.
5. **Be careful with medications:** Avoid taking too much medicine by following package directions. Also, to avoid harmful drug interactions, tell your doctor about all medicines you are taking.
6. **Get smart about antibiotics:** Help prevent antibiotic resistance by taking all your antibiotics as prescribed, and not sharing your antibiotics with other people. Remember that antibiotics don't work against viruses like the ones that cause the common cold.
7. **Watch out for *Clostridium difficile*:** *C. difficile* is a germ that can cause severe diarrhea in the elderly and in persons with weakened immune systems. Tell your doctor if you have severe diarrhea, especially if you are also taking an antibiotic.
8. **Know the signs and symptoms of infection:** Some skin infections, like Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), appear as redness, pain, or drainage at an intravenous catheter site or surgical incision site. A fever may or may not be present. Tell your doctor if you have these symptoms.
9. **Get your flu shot:** Protect yourself against the flu and other complications by getting vaccinated.
10. **Prepare for surgery:** Ask your doctor what you should do to prepare for surgery and tell him/her about any medical conditions you have. The following list, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, includes suggested questions to ask your surgeon and other members of your surgical team to

help you prepare for surgery. Additional information can be found on their website at <http://www.ahrq.gov>.

- ✓ Why do I need surgery?
- ✓ What kind of surgery do I need?
- ✓ What will you be doing?
- ✓ Have you done this surgery before? How many times?
- ✓ How successful is this surgery?
- ✓ Will I need anesthesia?
- ✓ How long will the surgery take?
- ✓ What will happen after the surgery?
- ✓ What kind of pain can I expect?
- ✓ How long will I be in the hospital?
- ✓ How long will it take me to recover?
- ✓ What are the benefits and risks of having this surgery?
- ✓ What are the possible complications?
- ✓ What are the alternatives to surgery?
- ✓ How much will the surgery cost?
- ✓ Will my insurance cover the surgery?
- ✓ Why is your hospital best for this surgery?

These and other sets of guidelines for preventing such HAI as central line and urinary catheter associated infections, as well as *C. difficile* and MRSA infections can be found on CDC's website, www.cdc.gov.