NATIONAL PATIENT SAFETY FOUNDATION® (NPSF)

Preventing Infections in the Hospital – What You Can Do:

A Consumer Fact Sheet

Infections can occur after many types of medical procedures. This is particularly true if you are having surgery. There are several things you can do to help protect yourself from infections in the hospital.

Planning ahead for surgery (if applicable)…

- Don't be afraid to ask questions about your care so that you may fully understand your treatment plan and expected outcomes. You and your family/friends will be able to better facilitate your recovery.
- If you have diabetes, be sure that you and your doctor discuss the best way to control your blood sugar before, during, and after your hospital stay. High blood sugar increases the risk of infection noticeably.
- If you are overweight, losing weight will reduce the risk of infection following surgery.
- If you are a smoker, you should consider a smoking cessation program. This will reduce the chance of developing a lung infection while in the hospital and may also improve your healing abilities following surgery.

While in the hospital following surgery…

- Wash your hands carefully after handling any type of soiled material. This is especially important after you have gone to the bathroom.
- Since you are part of your healthcare team, do not be afraid to remind doctors and nurses about washing their hands before working with you.
- If you have an intravenous catheter, keep the skin around the dressing clean and dry. Tell your nurse promptly if the dressing works loose or gets wet.
- Likewise, if you have a dressing on a wound, let your nurse know promptly if it works loose or gets wet.
- If you have any type of catheter or drainage tube, let your nurse know promptly if it becomes loose or dislodged.
- Carefully follow your doctor's instructions regarding breathing treatments and getting out of bed. Don't be afraid to ask for help, advice, or sufficient pain medications!
- If possible, ask your friends and relatives not to visit if they themselves feel ill.

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