

# UC HEALTH

## Preventing Infection After Colon or Rectal Surgery

An infection that occurs in any part of the body where surgery takes place is called a “surgical site infection” or SSI. SSIs can happen in any part of the surgical area, from the skin into the belly. SSIs can also include the metal, mesh, or plastic parts (also known as implants) that may be placed during the surgery.

SSIs occur because germs that are on the skin and in your colon or rectum can get into the surgical area. Some factors can raise your risk for SSI including: older age, being overweight, having diabetes or other health problems that affect your immune system, having a bowel infection before your surgery, the length of your surgery, and being a smoker.

Up to 15 out of every 100 patients having colon or rectal surgery will get an SSI. SSIs can make it harder to heal after surgery. SSIs may also cause more pain, stress, the need for more medications, and SSIs raise the costs of care. SSIs can make you go back to the hospital or have more surgery. Our goal is to prevent an SSI from happening to you whenever possible.

Your doctors, nurses and others caring for you will do many things to prevent SSI, such as:

- Wear hair covers, masks, gowns, and gloves during surgery to keep the surgery area clean
- Clean their hands and arms with a special soap just before surgery
- Clean your skin at the surgery site with a special soap that kills germs
- Give you antibiotics (drugs that kill germs) at the start of your surgery and sometimes during the surgery

To prevent SSIs, here is what you can do:

- Talk to your doctor about any health problems (such as diabetes) before your surgery.
- If you smoke, quit. Your doctor can help.
- Shower or clean your skin with a special soap/rinse that you will get from your doctor before your surgery.
- Take medicine to clean out your bowel before your surgery only if your doctor gives it to you.

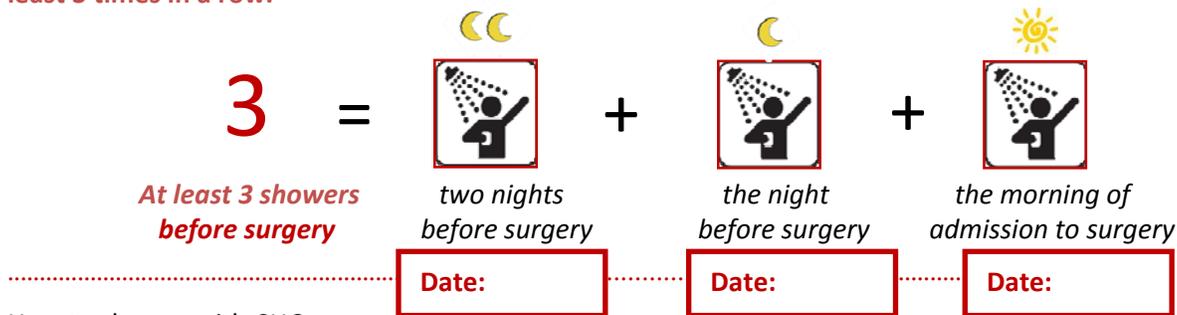
## Preparing for your surgery

### Shower with Chlorhexidine (CHG) soap to prevent infection

#### Instructions:

You should shower with CHG soap a minimum of three times before your surgery, or more often as directed by your surgeon. In the event that your surgery date is moved to an earlier date, complete as many showers as you can manage. Emergency cases are excluded from these bathing instructions.

Showering several times before surgery blocks germ growth and provides the best protection when used **at least 3 times in a row.**



#### How to shower with CHG soap:

1. Rinse your body with warm water.
2. Wash your hair with regular shampoo.  
Rinse your hair with water. If you are having neck surgery, use CHG soap instead of your regular shampoo to wash your hair.  
Rinse your hair with water.
3. Wet a clean sponge. Turn off the water.  
Apply CHG liberally.
4. Firmly massage all areas: neck, arms, chest, back, abdomen, hips, groin, genitals (external only) and buttocks. Clean your legs and feet and between your fingers and toes. Pay special attention to the site of your surgery and all surrounding skin.  
Ask for help to clean your back if you have a spinal surgery.
5. Lather again before rinsing.
6. Turn on the water and rinse CHG off your body.
7. Dry off with a clean towel.
8. Don't apply lotions or powders.
9. Use clean clothes and freshly laundered bed linens.

**Repeat steps 1-9 each time you shower.**

**Caution: When using CHG soap, avoid contact with eyes, nose, ear canals and mouth.**

#### Important reminders:

- Do not use any other soaps or body wash when using CHG. Other soaps can block the CHG benefits.
- After showering, do not apply lotion, cream, powder, deodorant, or hair conditioner.
- Do not shave or remove body hair. Facial shaving is permitted. If you are having head surgery, ask your doctor whether you can shave.
- CHG is safe to use on minor wounds, rashes, burns, and over staples and stitches.
- Allergic reactions are rare but may occur. If you have an allergic reaction, stop using CHG and call your doctor if you have a skin irritation.
- If you are allergic to CHG, please follow the bathing instructions above using an over-the-counter regular soap instead of CHG.