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Patient Name:

Special Instructions:

Follow Up:

Splenectomy

Splenectomy

What does the spleen do?

Your spleen, an organ located in the upper left side of your abdomen, helps your body resist infection. Sometimes, the spleen stops working properly as a result of an accident or other health problems. In certain cases, a person's spleen has to be taken out. This surgical procedure is called a splenectomy.

What are the risks if my spleen has to be taken out?

If your spleen has to be or has been taken out, you are more at risk of getting severe infections. Your risk of infection is highest in the first 2 years after you have a splenectomy. Your risk will also depend in part on your age and whether you have other diseases.

When do I need to call my doctor?

If your spleen has been taken out, call your doctor at the first sign of infection, such as fever or chills. Also call your doctor if you have a severe sore throat, an unexplained cough, severe abdominal pain, a headache or drowsiness.

What can I do to reduce the risk of infection?


Talk with your doctor about how to protect yourself from infections. Tell all your doctors, dentists and other health care workers that your spleen has been removed.

Vaccines can help prevent some infections. Before your splenectomy, you should get vaccinated against pneumococcal infection and get a booster shot every 3 to 5 years. You should also get a flu shot each year. Your doctor may want you to get 2 other shots, one to protect you against *Haemophilus* infections and another to protect against meningitis.

A note about vaccines

Sometimes the amount of a certain vaccine cannot keep up with the number of people who need it. More info... 

Children who have a splenectomy might need to take antibiotics for at least 2 years after the procedure, and sometimes until age 21. Adults who plan to travel to remote areas or who for some other reason won't have a doctor available should have a supply of antibiotics to take at the first sign of infection. Talk to your doctor about which antibiotics are right for you.

If you travel to tropical countries, avoid the risk of malaria . You are also more likely to get infections from dog bites, and to get babesiosis, an infection transmitted by deer ticks. Let your doctor know if you plan to travel to areas where these conditions are common. Seek care immediately if a dog bites you or if you notice a rash that forms after you are bitten by a tick.

Other Organizations

Detection, Education and Management of the Asplenic or Hyposplenic Patient by ML Brigden, M.D.
(American Family Physician 02/01/01, <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20010201/499.html>)

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