

Splenectomy in Children

A Guide for Patients & Parents

Why is splenectomy necessary?

A variety of chronic illnesses, such as hereditary spherocytosis or idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura, may make it necessary to remove your child's spleen. Spleen removal is called splenectomy. Splenectomy is rarely an emergency and can be scheduled at a time that is the most convenient for your family. There are specific requirements regarding immunizations and blood work that may need to be completed prior to this operation. Please check with your child's blood specialist (hematologist) prior to surgery.

How is a splenectomy performed?

A large incision may not be required. In most cases, a splenectomy can be performed laparoscopically by a pediatric surgeon using a small telescope and miniaturized instruments placed through Band-Aid-sized incisions on the abdomen. The operation is completed in approximately two to three hours. Your child will stay in the hospital for two to three days. During hospitalization, your child will receive intravenous fluids, antibiotics and pain medication. As soon as your child feels well enough, he or she will be allowed to eat and drink and take pain medication by mouth, usually two to three days after surgery.

How do I take care of my child at home following discharge from the hospital?

Pain: Prescription pain medication is not routinely required after hospital discharge. Most children only need Tylenol® or Motrin® once they are at home. Follow the dosage directions on the label. If your child is still uncomfortable, call our office and we may prescribe something stronger.

Dressings: Gauze and clear plastic dressing placed over the incisions may be removed two days after surgery. There may be a small amount of blood on the Steri-strips®, small pieces of tape over the incision. This is normal. Your child can bathe with the Steri-strips® in place. These can be removed one week after the operation. The skin surrounding the incision may be red and bruised, and the incision may be slightly swollen. This can last several weeks. There will be no visible stitches to remove because they are under the skin. The stitches will dissolve after several weeks.

Healing ridge: After the incisions are healed, you will be able to feel a firm ridge just underneath. This is called a healing ridge and it is normal. The healing ridge usually lasts for several months before it softens and disappears.

Bathing: Your child may bathe or shower as soon as two days after surgery. Once your child is feeling better, before discharge or at home, he or she may bathe or shower without restriction.

Activity: There are no specific activity restrictions following surgery. Your child can return to school as soon as he or she feels well enough. If you need a letter sent to your child's school regarding the operation and recovery, please contact our office.

Antibiotics: Your child does not need to be on daily antibiotics if he or she received all necessary immunizations prior to splenectomy. If he or she develops a temperature of 101 degrees at any time after the operation, penicillin or erythromycin if your child is allergic to penicillin will be required to prevent an overwhelming infection. Contact your child's doctor or hematologist. If you cannot reach your child's physician, proceed to the emergency room nearest your home.

Do I see the surgeon again after the operation?

If all is going well, a visit to our office is not required. Our pediatric nurse practitioner will call you to check on your child's recovery. A visit with your child's hematologist one to two weeks after the discharge is recommended.

When do I call your office?

Call our office at (415) 476-2538 if:

- You have any concerns you have about your child's recovery
- Your child has a temperature of 101 degrees or higher
- Your child's incision is red
- There is severe pain and tenderness at the incision
- Any fluid is coming out of the incision

This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace the advice of your physician or health care provider. We encourage you to discuss with your physician any questions and concerns you may have.