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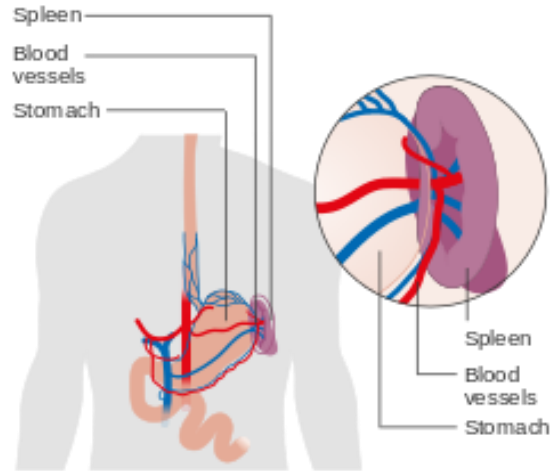
Splenectomy
Lifelong precautions

What is a splenectomy?

The spleen is a small, solid organ, located in the upper left side of the abdomen just under the rib cage. It has many functions, one of which is to help fight certain types of bacterial infections. Your spleen has been removed as part of your surgical procedure. You should inform your primary care doctor and family members of this fact.

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What are my lifelong precautions once my spleen is removed?

Watch for infections:

The majority of patients have no problems after their spleen has been removed, but less than 1% (one percent, or one in one hundred) of patients may have difficulty fighting certain types of infections. Extremely severe infections can lead to Overwhelming Post-Splenectomy Sepsis (OPSS). OPSS can be life threatening, and it is absolutely essential to seek immediate treatment. Symptoms of these infections include:

- Fever
- chills
- Severe sore throat
- Unexplained cough
- Severe abdominal pain

- Severe headache

Contact your primary care doctor immediately or go to an emergency room for any illness that causes you to have a temperature of 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit (taken orally).

Notify your healthcare providers:

Notify your primary care doctor, your dentist and other healthcare providers that you do not have a spleen. If you have a fever or illness report it immediately to your primary care doctor.

Take antibiotics:

Most adults are given a prescription for an antibiotic (e.g. Augmentin) to keep at home and begin taking in the event they begin to exhibit symptoms of an infection (see page 1). It is important to keep these prescriptions up to date. Taking this prescription is not a substitute for contacting a medical professional and seeking immediate care. Please ask your primary care physician about providing you with "standby" antibiotics in case of an emergency. If you are traveling, it is important to take antibiotics with you in case you develop an infection.

Get periodic Blood work:

Your primary care physician should also periodically check your platelet count. It may increase significantly after your spleen is removed. If the platelet count increases beyond 1 million, you should be started on an aspirin a day.

Get Vaccinations:

People without a spleen need to follow a special vaccination schedule. This schedule is described in the handout "Immunization Record for Adults with a Splenectomy or Splenic Embolization". Keep a record of all vaccinations.

Take precautions before Travel:

If you travel to tropical countries, take precautions to prevent malaria. Vaccinations are available for malaria. You are also more likely to get infections from dog bites, and to get babesios, an infection transmitted by deer ticks. Seek care immediately if you are bitten by a dog or if you notice a rash that forms after you are bitten by a tick.

Wear a Medical alert ID

We encourage you to wear a MedicAlert bracelet or necklace (available from MedicAlert Foundation International, 2323 Colorado Ave., Turlock, CA 95382; telephone: 1-800-432-5378; Web address: http://www.medicalert.org). You should also carry a card in your wallet explaining that you have had your spleen removed and any other pertinent clinical details.

If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this handout, please contact your primary care doctor or surgeon.