

# Splenectomy

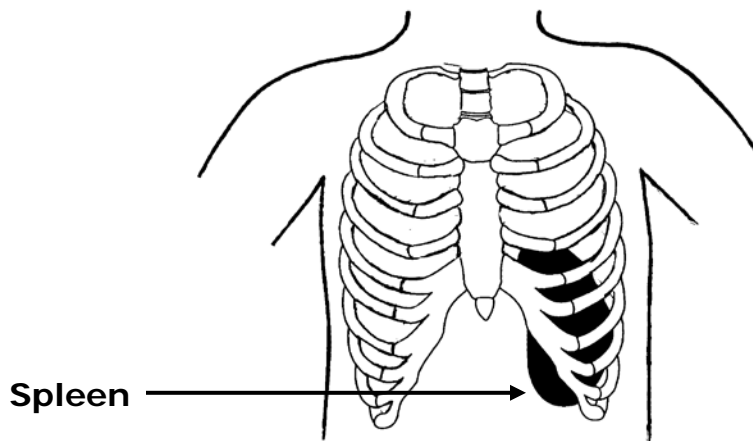
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## What is a splenectomy?

Splenectomy is a surgery to remove the spleen. The spleen is an organ of the body. It is found in the upper left corner of the abdomen, under the ribs. The spleen protects the body from infection and acts as a filter for the blood.

A splenectomy is usually done if the spleen is bleeding, injured or affected by disease.



## What happens before surgery?

A Child Life Specialist and a nurse will help you and your child get ready for surgery. Your child will also see the Anesthesiologist. You will be given a checklist of instructions to follow the day before surgery.

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## What happens during surgery?

Your child will be given a general anesthetic so that he or she will be asleep during the surgery and not feel any pain.

Splenectomy can be done by 2 different methods; laparoscopic splenectomy and open splenectomy. The surgeon will decide which method is best for your child.

- With **laparoscopic splenectomy**, the surgeon makes small incisions in the abdomen. Thin instruments, including one with a camera are used. For some children, the splenectomy cannot be done this way.
- With **open splenectomy** the surgeon makes one incision large enough to remove the spleen.

## What happens right after surgery?

Your child will go to the Post Anesthetic Care Unit (PACU) after surgery. In the PACU, your child will be closely monitored until he or she is fully awake. As soon as possible, the nurse will bring you to the PACU to be with your child. When your child is ready, he or she will be moved to the children's ward. The ward nurses will continue to care for your child during his or her recovery.

## How can I help my child feel more comfortable?

After surgery, the amount and type of pain is different for each child. Several medications are readily available to help your child feel more comfortable. Please let the nurse know if you think your child is in pain.

To relieve your child's pain at home, the surgeon may give you a prescription for pain medication. If you do not have a prescription, you may give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol®). Follow the directions on the package for your child's age and weight.

To learn more, ask your nurse for the information sheet called **Learning about relieving your child's pain.**

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## What can my child eat and drink?

After an open splenectomy, your child may have a nasogastric tube (NG Tube). This thin plastic tube is placed through the nose down into your child's stomach. Gentle suction up through the tube keeps the stomach empty. When the tube is removed, he or she will start drinking clear fluids.

With laparoscopic splenectomy, your child can begin to have ice chips and drink clear fluids as soon as he or she is fully awake.

Your child may not feel like eating right after surgery, but he or she will get fluids and medications through the intravenous line. When your child can tolerate clear fluids, your child can gradually return to his or her usual diet.

## How do I take care of the incision(s)?

There are small white tapes across the incision(s). The nurse will check the dressing(s) and change them if necessary. The tapes usually fall off on their own. If the tapes have not fallen off after 10 days, gently soak and remove them. Keep the incision(s) clean and dry.

You may give your child a sponge bath until the tapes fall off. Then he or she may have a bath or shower. Use mild soap and no bubble bath. Pat the incision(s) dry after the bath.

## What activity can my child do?

If your child has had a **laparoscopic splenectomy** (4 small incisions) he or she can resume usual activities in about 1 to 2 weeks.

If your child has had an **open splenectomy** (1 incision) he or she can resume usual activities in about 4 weeks.

When your child leaves the hospital, he or she must not do any strenuous physical activity or contact sports for 1 to 2 months. The doctor will discuss these restrictions with you.

## When can my child go home?

How long your child will stay in hospital depends on the type of surgery and how soon he or she resumes a usual diet. The hospital stay may be from 2 to 5 days.

**Before you go home, make a follow-up appointment for your child with your surgeon, 1 to 2 weeks after surgery.**

## When should I call the surgeon?

**Call your surgeon right away if you notice your child has any of these problems:**

- your child feels ill or has a fever; a temperature higher than 38.5°C (101.3°F)
- redness, swelling, active or persistent bleeding or drainage (discharge) from an incision
- pain that does not go away or seems to be getting worse
- unable to eat or drink as usual, nausea or vomiting
- fewer wet diapers, or trouble passing urine

Call McMaster Children's Hospital **905-521-2100** and ask for the surgeon's office.

After hours or on weekends, call **905-521-5030** and ask to have the Pediatric Surgeon on-call paged.

If you cannot reach your surgeon, bring your child to the Emergency Department at the McMaster Children's Hospital. If you are not in the Hamilton area, go to the nearest emergency room.

**For questions that are not urgent,  
please call your family doctor or pediatrician.**