

## Living without a spleen

---

### What does my spleen do?

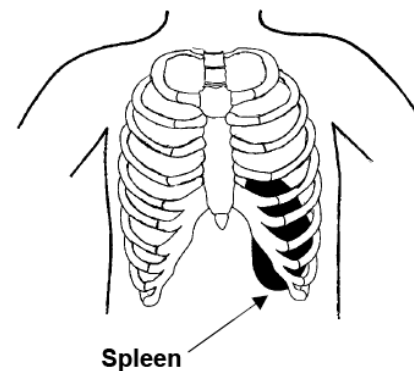
The spleen's job is to help your body fight infections.

It does this by:

- working like a filter to remove germs from your blood
- making antibodies that target and attack specific germs

The spleen is on your left side, partly under your ribs.

It is normally about the size of your fist.



### What is wrong with my spleen?

Your doctor has recommended surgery to remove your spleen. This can stop or prevent certain health problems. The members of your health care team will give you more information about the problem with your spleen.

### What health problems can occur without a spleen?

If your spleen is not working or it is removed, you have a greater chance of getting serious infections with certain types of bacteria that cause lung infection (pneumonia) or brain infection (meningitis). Fortunately, these infections can usually be prevented by shots (immunizations) and medicine (antibiotics).

Despite these efforts, it is possible to get an infection. An infection must be treated right away. Without treatment, an infection could become life-threatening.

---

## What must I do before surgery to prevent infections?

Now that you have a plan for surgery, you need to visit your family doctor to review your immunizations. There are certain shots you may need before surgery, if you have not already had them.

Here are the shots you should have before surgery:

Vaccine	What it protects you from	When to have the shot
Pevnar 13	Infections of the brain, lungs and blood	At least 10 weeks before surgery (8 weeks before Pneumovax vaccine)
Pneumovax	Lung infection (Pneumococcal pneumonia)	At least 2 weeks before surgery
HiB	A dangerous flu (Haemophilus influenzae type B)	At least 2 weeks before surgery
Menactra	A brain infection (Meningococcal meningitis)	At least 2 weeks before surgery

You may not have had these shots before, as they are not included in the routine childhood immunizations.

Your family doctor can give you the shots you need. If your doctor has questions, he or she may call 905-521-2100:

- ext. 75014 for the Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Clinic
- ext. 75475 to speak with the Registered Nurse in the Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Clinic

## What can I do to have a healthy life after surgery?

### 1. To stay healthy, do your best to prevent getting infections.

Here's what you can do:

- Take your antibiotic each day. This is usually Penicillin. If you are allergic to Penicillin, you will be given another antibiotic.  
This medicine will be prescribed by your Pediatric Hematologist.  
Your doctor will tell you how long you need to take this medicine.  
Some children need to take antibiotics for many years.
- Get the flu shot every year.
- Keep your immunizations up to date. You will need “boosters” (shots every 5 years after your first one) to prevent pneumonia and meningitis – for the rest of your life.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water or use hand sanitizer.
- Avoid situations where you may come in contact with people who have infections. This may mean avoiding crowds or traveling to certain places. Your doctor can give you more advice about traveling.

### 2. Watch for warning signs of infection.

- Antibiotics and immunizations cannot guarantee that you will not get an infection.

**Call your doctor if you have any of these signs of infection:**

- fever - a temperature higher than 38°C (100 °F)
- stomach pain
- sore throat
- skin rash
- cough
- headache
- shaking and chills
- drowsiness
- feeling sick or throwing up
- pain when you pass urine

please turn over →

- 3. Always wear medical alert identification** and carry an information card in your wallet that says your spleen was removed. Your wallet card should also list the names and dates of your immunizations.



- 4. Have a healthy lifestyle.** This means eating well, being active every day, getting enough rest and sleep and finding ways to cope with stress. If you would like more information or help making lifestyle changes, talk with your doctor or nurse.

Here are some resources that can help:

- Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide at Health Canada’s website: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)
- Canada’s Physical Activity Guide at Public Health Agency of Canada’s website: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)

## Other instructions:

---

---

---

---

---

**If you have any questions about surgery or living without a spleen, please speak with a member of your health care team.**