

SPLENECTOMY

The spleen is a small organ located on the left side of the abdomen, under the rib cage. This organ is part of the immune system and helps to fight off infections while also filtering damaged and old cells out of the bloodstream. If the spleen needs to be removed, the surgical procedure is called a splenectomy.

Undergoing a spleen removal leaves the patient with a compromised, or weakened, immune system. Since infections can be more dangerous without a spleen, the patient may need yearly vaccines and prophylactic antibiotics. Prophylactic antibiotics are used to prevent a bacterial infection from occurring. They aren't used to treat an existing infection.

Reasons for a splenectomy :

- a spleen that's damaged from injury
- an enlarged spleen
- certain rare blood disorders
- an enlarged or ruptured spleen, which can occur from trauma
- cancer or large cysts of the spleen
- infection

Blood Disorders

The spleen may need to be removed because of a severe blood disorder that doesn't respond to other treatments. Blood disorders of this type include:

- sickle cell anemia
- hemolytic anemia
- idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura
- polycythemia vera

Enlarged Spleen

A viral infection, such as mononucleosis, or a bacterial infection, such as syphilis, can cause the spleen to become enlarged.

An enlarged spleen traps an excessive amount of blood cells and platelets. Eventually it traps and destroys healthy red blood cells as well. This is called hypersplenism, and it leads to a large reduction of healthy blood cells and platelets in the bloodstream. The spleen becomes clogged, which then begins to interfere with its functioning. An enlarged spleen can cause anemia, infection, and excessive bleeding. It may eventually rupture, which is life-threatening.

Ruptured Spleen

If the spleen has ruptured, a splenectomy is required immediately because of life-threatening internal bleeding. A rupture may be caused by a physical injury, such as being hit by a car, or by an enlargement of the spleen.

Cancer

Certain cancers such as lymphocytic leukemia, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and Hodgkin's disease affect the spleen. These can cause the spleen to enlarge, which can lead to a rupture. The spleen may also need to be removed because of the presence of a cyst or tumour.

Infection

A severe infection in the spleen may not respond to antibiotics or other treatments. This type of infection can lead to a more serious abscess or an inflammation and a buildup of pus. The spleen may need to be removed to resolve the infection.

Types of Splenectomy

A splenectomy may be performed as a traditional open surgery or as a laparoscopic, or minimally invasive, procedure.

Open Splenectomy

A traditional open surgery involves making a cut in the abdomen. The surgeon then moves aside other tissues to remove the spleen. The incision is then closed with stitches. Open surgery is preferred if you have scar tissue from other surgeries or if your spleen has ruptured, or if it is safer to do so.

Laparoscopic Splenectomy

This type of surgery is minimally invasive and has a quicker and less painful recovery time than open surgery. In a laparoscopic splenectomy, the surgeon makes just a few small cuts in the abdomen. Then, they use a small camera to project a video of your spleen onto a monitor. The surgeon can then remove the spleen with small instruments. The wounds are then sutured closed. The surgeon may decide an open surgery is necessary after viewing your spleen on the camera.

The Benefits of a Splenectomy

This is major surgery and leaves the patient with a compromised immune system. For these reasons, it is only performed when necessary. The benefits of a splenectomy are that it can resolve several health issues such as blood diseases, cancer, and infection that could not be treated any other way. Having a ruptured spleen removed can save your life.

The Risks of a Spleen Removal

- blood loss during the surgery
- allergic reactions or breathing difficulties from anaesthesia
- the formation of blood clots
- infection
- stroke or heart attack

There are also risks associated with the removal of the spleen in particular. These include:

- formation of a blood clot in the vein that moves blood to your liver
- a hernia at the incision site
- an internal infection
- a collapsed lung
- damage to the organs near your spleen, including the stomach, colon, and pancreas
- a collection of pus under your diaphragm

Open and laparoscopic splenectomies both have risks.

Full recovery from a splenectomy usually takes between four and six weeks. Generally the patient will be in hospital for a few days following the surgery.

After splenectomy the patient always be more susceptible to infection and may need vaccinations and prophylactic antibiotics longterm.

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