Cotton Swab can Cut Down on Post-surgical Wound Infections by Alice Merry

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Post-surgical wound infections are very common but can be a serious threat to health of the patients. Infections like MRSA, contracted during hospital stay can be particularly dangerous. Treating such infections is not only time consuming but expensive also. About 25 percent of all hospital related infections are post surgical infections. Common source of post-surgical infections are contaminated wounds. Unfortunately, currently there is no reliable preventive treatment for these infections, even antibiotics donâ€™t always work. Wound dressings like duoderm can be helpful but not very effective. A new research shares that a cotton swab, commonly used in houses, can be used to curb these infections.

In a recent research study at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, the researchers showed that probing with a dry cotton swab significantly reduces post surgical infections. Shirin Towfigh, MD, a surgeon at the Cedars Sinai together with colleagues conducted a study to assess the efficacy of using a cotton swab on post-operative wounds. There were 76 subjects in the study, all of whom had an appendectomy. Patients were divided into two groups; both groups had their wounds stapled loosely. Afterward, one group had their wounds swabbed with iodine, while the other group was probed with a dry, sterile cotton swab.

The researchers found that probing with dry; cotton swab resulted in considerable reduction in post-surgical infections and also reduction in pain. The rate of infection in the cotton swab group was only three percent as compared to 19 percent in the iodine group. Patients in the cotton swab group also experienced better healing and less scarring of infections as well as shorter hospital stay as compared to the other group.

"That a humble cotton swab could have such an impact in reducing the incidence of hospital-acquired infections is really quite remarkable," Towfigh said. "This study reminds us that scientists can still find effective treatments when we are willing to think outside of the 'technology box.' "

The researchers have yet to figure out the exact mechanism due to which infections are reduced. They hypothesized that probing of the wound helps drain contaminated fluids.

"This practice was introduced to me as a surgical resident 15 years ago," Towfigh says. "I've used it routinely since then. While I thought all surgeons were aware of this treatment approach, I learned otherwise when I began my professional career. Since it was evident to me that probing certain wounds after surgery resulted in far fewer infections, I developed this clinical trial so that my colleagues across the country could learn about -- and confidently adopt -- the practice."

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