


# Back to Basics: Sterile Technique 1.5

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### Purpose/Goal

To provide the learner with knowledge of best practices related to proper sterile technique.

### Objectives

1. Discuss common areas of concern that relate to perioperative best practices.
2. Discuss best practices that could enhance safety in the perioperative area.
3. Describe implementation of evidence-based practice in relation to perioperative nursing care.

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Lisa Spruce, DNP, RN, CNS-CP, CNOR, ACNS, ACNP, FAAN, has no declared affiliation that could be perceived as posing a potential conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

The behavioral objectives for this program were created by Kristi Van Anderson, BSN, RN, CNOR, clinical editor, with consultation from Susan Bakewell, MS, RN-BC, director, Perioperative Education. Ms Van Anderson and Ms Bakewell have no declared affiliations that could be perceived as posing potential conflicts of interest in the publication of this article.

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## ABSTRACT

Sterile technique is an essential patient safety principle that reduces the risk of microbial transmission to patients during surgery. The ability to establish and maintain a sterile environment is an important skill for all perioperative team members. Understanding the principles of sterile technique is crucial for anyone entering the perioperative environment. This Back to Basics article reviews sterile technique and the importance of all perioperative team members adhering to aseptic principles. *AORN J* 105 (May 2017) 478-487. © AORN, Inc, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aorn.2017.02.014>

Key words: *sterile technique, sterile field, sterile drapes, surgical site infection, gloving.*

**E**stablishing and maintaining a sterile field when performing surgical or other invasive procedures prevents microbial contamination, which can pose a serious risk of infection for patients. All perioperative team members who are involved in these procedures are responsible for providing patients with a safe environment of care and should be vigilant in safeguarding the sterility of the field by ensuring that everyone present in the OR follows the principles and processes of sterile technique. As patient advocates, perioperative nurses have the professional responsibility to speak up when there is a breach in the sterile field and to correct that breach immediately.<sup>1</sup>

Sterile technique begins when the team members don surgical attire and should be performed according to the recommendations in AORN's "Guideline for surgical attire."<sup>2</sup> Sterile technique also requires adherence to hand hygiene and the surgical hand scrub, both of which are addressed in AORN's "Guideline for hand hygiene."<sup>3</sup> These topics are not discussed in this Back to Basics article but are essential to proper sterile technique. Recommendations for these subjects can be accessed in AORN's *Guidelines for Perioperative Practice*.<sup>4</sup> This article addresses the important sterile technique concepts that every perioperative RN should know and practice.

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## HOW-TO GUIDE

To establish and maintain a sterile field properly, perioperative team members must perfect several techniques. This article discusses some of the sterile technique concepts essential to providing safe care for patients.

### Gowns and Gloves

Perioperative team members wear sterile gowns and gloves to prevent direct contact between their skin and clothing and the patient. Before donning sterile gowns and gloves, perioperative team members should perform hand hygiene according to the recommendations in AORN's "Guideline for hand hygiene."<sup>3</sup> After performing the surgical hand scrub, the scrub person should don a sterile gown and gloves while adhering to the following recommendations:<sup>5</sup>

- Don gowns and gloves away from the main instrument table, taking care not to contaminate the gowns or gloves. This helps to prevent water droplets or skin antiseptic solution on wet hands from dripping on the instrument table.
- Ensure that arms are completely dry before donning the sterile gown.
- Touch the inside of the gown only when picking it up to prevent the front of the gown from becoming contaminated.

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