





# Laparoscopic Surgery and the Care and Handling of Laparoscopic Devices

BY DANIELLE FLETCHER, PRODUCT MANAGER—AESCULAP

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Review laparoscopic surgery and the types of laparoscopic devices available for use
2. Discuss the differences between monopolar and bipolar electrosurgery and devices
3. Review the care and handling recommendations for laparoscopic devices

**S**urgery has historically been performed through open surgery. Since the late 1980s, however, minimally invasive surgery (MIS) has been a growing trend as a preferred surgery option, and more surgeons are using this approach. MIS procedures allow for reduction in the size and number of access sites, specific to the abdominal cavity when performing laparoscopic surgery.

This lesson plan discusses minimally invasive laparoscopic surgeries. It is imperative that all members of the laparoscopic team involved in the care, handling and processing of laparoscopic instruments know and implement proper processing procedures.

### Objective 1: Review laparoscopic surgery and the types of laparoscopic devices available for use

Laparoscopic instrumentation has evolved over time. The original

laparoscopic devices could not be disassembled and were very difficult to clean. The next generation included irrigation ports to help make it easier to clean the instruments' lumens. The addition of ports improved the cleaning process, but the instruments were still very time-consuming and difficult to clean, especially when manual cleaning methods were used.

The third generation of laparoscopic devices has evolved further, and many of these devices can be partially or fully disassembled for more efficient cleaning of lumens and small crevices. However, care is still needed to ensure that these parts are reassembled correctly and that the instrument functions properly after cleaning.

Laparoscopic surgical techniques are as effective as open surgery and have the following advantages:

- Reduced hospital stays due to the less invasive process and smaller incisions. Many laparoscopic cases result in the



patient's discharge the same day of surgery.

- Fewer blood transfusions are typically needed.
- Reduced post-operative pain. Smaller surgical scars on the body, both internally and externally, result in less pain.
- Decreased chance of internal surgical infections. Since internal organs are not exposed to possible contaminants in the outside air, there is less chance of internal surgical infections. Smaller wounds typically result in fewer complications and infections.
- Earlier return to normal activity or work.

Although laparoscopic surgery has many advantages, there are also some disadvantages and risks. Some are common to all types of surgery, including reaction to or problems with anesthesia, excessive bleeding, infection, or delayed healing caused by swelling, bruising or comorbidities. *Note: Comorbidities occur when there is one or more co-existing medical condition or disease process in addition to the initial diagnosis.*

Other complications that may occur are specific to laparoscopic surgery. For example, in traditional laparoscopic surgery, the surgeon has a limited range of motion, so it can be difficult to maneuver the instruments, tissue and organs. It can also be a challenge for the surgeon to perceive depth properly, and the surgical tool's endpoints move in the opposite direction of the surgeon's hands. Moving the instruments is, therefore, not intuitive and takes more time to learn. Additionally, the surgeon is working with reduced or without tactile sensation, and this may cause them to use more force than needed, which can result in tissue damage.

There are various types of laparoscopic devices in the marketplace, including reusable, disposable and reusable (part-reusable, part-disposable) instruments. Reusable instruments can be sold as a complete device or purchased as individual components. The instrument, if modular, usually consists of a jaw insert, insulated outer tube and handle. Different types of handles come with laparoscopic instruments. The two standard types are with or without a ratchet. Disposable instruments come packaged sterile as a complete instrument with or without a cord. They are standard-use instruments, which can also be insulated to the tip. They are packaged in different box sizes depending on the manufacturer. Reusable instruments have a disposable component, usually the shaft, and a reusable component, the handle. These devices combine the convenience of a single-use instrument with the cost savings of a reusable product.

Laparoscopic instruments are available in various lengths and sizes. The lengths range from 20–29cm for short/mini or pediatric devices to 31–37cm for standard devices and 37–42cm for bariatric devices. The instrument diameter can be 3.5mm (mini), 5mm (standard) or 10mm (bariatric).

Different types of instruments are used in laparoscopic surgery: scissors, hooks, graspers, needle holders and a wide range of specialty instruments. It is important to remember that certain instruments can be heavy and have delicate tips. When putting these instrument sets together, it is critical to keep the weight of the sets reasonable, following the industry standard of a maximum weight of 25 pounds for containerized sets. In some instances,

a single laparoscopic set may require multiple containers.

Broadly speaking, laparoscopic instruments can be divided into two major categories: (a) equipment and instruments for access and exposure and (b) instruments used to perform the actual surgical procedure. Many instruments used to perform laparoscopic procedures are very similar to general handheld surgical instruments and are classified in a similar way.

Equipment for access and exposure includes the laparoscope, camera, light source, television or video monitor, insufflator, CO<sub>2</sub> cylinder, suction irrigation machine and ancillary equipment. A variety of cables and tubes connect the different machines and instruments. The cables, cords, instruments and equipment present on the sterile field must be decontaminated and sterilized between uses.

Laparoscopic instruments are used in the many of today's surgeries, including:

- General surgery
- Bariatric surgery
- Gynecology
- Colorectal surgery
- Urology
- Hepatobiliary surgery
- Thoracic surgery

Common procedures performed laparoscopically include:

- Cholecystectomy: removal of the gallbladder
- Appendectomy: removal of the appendix
- Hysterectomy: removal of the uterus
- Nephrectomy: removal of the kidneys
- Gastrectomy: total or partial removal of the stomach (sleeve gastrectomy or bowel resection)



## Objective 2: Discuss the differences between monopolar and bipolar electrosurgery and devices

Many laparoscopic instruments have a cautery post to deliver electrosurgical energy to the instrument's distal (furthest) end. This allows for cutting soft tissue and stopping bleeding from small blood vessels. The instrument shaft is insulated to ensure that energy does not escape and cause unintended harm to non-affected tissue. Nicks and cuts in the insulation can cause burns to tissue and organs in the abdominal cavity. This damage can go unnoticed because the surgeon is concentrating on the instrument's operative tips, or the damage may occur outside the surgeon's range of vision. In rare cases, the patient's stomach or intestines may be perforated which can lead to peritonitis.

The purpose of electrosurgery is to produce heat by concentrating electric current at target tissues to achieve desired results. The smaller the area of tissue-instrument contact that concentrates the current, the more resistance is built and more voltage (the force pushing electric current through the resistance) is required to move the current through the limited space. There are two basic types of electrosurgery:

*Monopolar* – The monopolar circuit includes a generator, instrument, active electrode, patient and patient grounding pad. The active electrode instrument is placed in the entry site and used to cut tissue and coagulate (seal) bleeding. A grounding pad (return electrode) is attached to the patient, and the high-frequency electrical current then flows from the generator to the instrument through the patient to the grounding pad and back to the generator. Monopolar electrosurgery is

popular because this type of energy is very versatile and effective. Monopolar generators typically produce outputs of 1 to 300 watts of energy in cut modes and 1 to 120 watts in the coagulation mode. Laparoscopic instruments are the most frequently used devices for monopolar electrosurgery.

*Bipolar* – Bipolar devices contain both the active and return electrodes, which means the active output and patient return functions both occur at the surgery site. The path of the electrical current is confined to the tissue between the two electrodes that are contained in, for example, the bipolar instrument's forceps. Bipolar electrosurgery requires less energy and allows the use of lower voltages. However, it has limited ability to cut and coagulate large bleeding areas, so it is ideally suited for coagulation of small arterial or venous blood vessels to control blood loss. Bipolar generators produce 1 to 80 watts of energy. These instruments can be configured as cutting and/or grasping tools, and they are made of a tubular shaft (lumen) with two jaw parts located at the distal end. The jaw parts are constructed of a metallic material and coupled by a joint. Electrical connections in the bipolar device generate a high-frequency electric current which increases the cutting effect when a cutting tool is used, and the coagulation of tissue contacted when a grasping tool is used. Electrical current passes from one side of the instrument jaw through the tissue to the other side of the jaw, then back to the generator.

All electrosurgical instruments should be tested for broken insulation and electrical leakage each time the device is processed.

## Objective 3: Review the care and handling recommendations for laparoscopic devices

Reusable laparoscopic instruments that are not properly cleaned and sterilized are a major cause of surgical site infections (SSIs). Proper device processing is critical not only for patient safety and positive surgical outcomes but to prevent damage to the instrument and maintain its useful life.

Basic cleaning equipment and accessories used for cleaning laparoscopic instruments should include:

- Accessories or adapters for connections for instruments and equipment
- Cleaning chemicals and lubricants
- Brushes for cleaning each device's shaft, ports, jaw and lumens
- Each device manufacturer's instructions for use (IFU)
- Mechanical equipment required by the IFU

All laparoscopic instruments have to be maintained to retain optimal functionality. Preventative and routine maintenance are essential to keeping laparoscopic devices in good working condition. Functional testing during device processing is key to finding instruments that need to be removed from a set and sent out for repair or replacement.

Immediately following any laparoscopic procedure, point-of-use treatment should be performed as quickly as possible following each manufacturer's IFU. Laparoscopic devices should then be placed in their specific instrument tray and secured for transport to the decontamination area.

During the sorting process in the decontamination area, instruments



should be quickly checked for obvious damage. The point-of-use spray or foam should be rinsed from each instrument. Instruments should be disassembled, if possible, and soaked per the IFU. After the pre-soak, instruments should be rinsed, the lumens brushed and flushed per the IFU, rinsed again, and then either manually cleaned or placed in the appropriate mechanical cleaner. When irrigating the lumens, be sure to use the correct adaptors and run the appropriate mechanical cycle.

During assembly, cleaning verification (CV) testing should be done following the facility's policy. Each instrument needs to be carefully checked for cleanliness, dried, assembled and tested for function. Insulated instruments need to be carefully checked for damage and leak tested. Sharp devices should be tested for sharpness as recommended by the manufacturer. Lubricate per the IFU. Devices should be disassembled and carefully placed inside the appropriate containment device. These devices are easily damaged so be sure they are

adequately protected. The use of tip protectors, laparoscopic instrument racks or other approved protection devices is encouraged as needed.

Instruments should be packaged then sterilized following the IFU, being careful that the appropriate sterilizer model and cycle are used to avoid damage. Handle the sterile device by lifting, not dragging, the tray, do not stack unless stated in the IFU, and transport carefully, being sure the devices are placed securely on the transport cart.

### Conclusion

Laparoscopic devices require careful attention and handling. It is critical that all members of the surgical team handling laparoscopic devices do so in a way that is safe and effective for patients and other colleagues in the hospital setting. Careful attention to detail, testing, cleaning, packaging and transport will help these devices have a long, well-functioning life. **P**



# CIS Self-Study Lesson Plan Quiz

## Laparoscopic Surgery and the Care and Handling of Laparoscopic Devices

Lesson No. CIS 300 (Instrument Continuing Education – ICE) · Lesson expires December 2026

1. What feature has made the current generation of laparoscopic devices easier to clean?
  - a. Irrigation ports have been eliminated
  - b. More components are disposable
  - c. Instruments can be partially or fully disassembled
  - d. All the above
2. Which is an advantage of using laparoscopic surgical techniques?
  - a. Small incisions result in less bleeding
  - b. Fewer blood transfusions are typically needed
  - c. Patient discharge can often occur the day of surgery
  - d. All the above
3. Which is a risk to all types of surgery, including those performed with laparoscopes?
  - a. Excessive bleeding
  - b. Infection
  - c. Reactions to anesthesia
  - d. All the above
4. Which is a possible complication unique to laparoscopic surgeries?
  - a. Delayed healing due to swelling
  - b. Problems created by comorbidities
  - c. The surgeon has a limited range of motion
  - d. Extended hospital stays
5. A laparoscope's cautery shaft is insulated to:
  - a. Reduce usage of electrical energy
  - b. Prevent energy from escaping and harming unintended tissue
  - c. Enable the surgeon to better grasp the instrument
  - d. Direct energy away from the scope's shaft
6. One of the most common laparoscopic procedures involves removal of the:
  - a. Gallbladder
  - b. Thyroid
  - c. Colon
  - d. Ovaries
7. A cautery unit and cable are used for:
  - a. Cutting soft tissue
  - b. Reducing internal scarring
  - c. Directing energy away from the scope's shaft
  - d. All the above
8. Laparoscopic instruments can be divided into how many major categories?
  - a. Two
  - b. Three
  - c. Four
  - d. Five
9. When monopolar instruments are used, there is no need for a grounding pad.
  - a. True
  - b. False
10. Electrosurgical instruments should be checked for electrical leakage:
  - a. Per facility policy
  - b. If damage is noted on the insulation
  - c. Each time they are processed
  - d. Weekly, preferably daily
11. During laparoscopic surgery, since internal organs are not exposed to the outside air:
  - a. There is less scarring
  - b. There is less chance for infection
  - c. There are no complications to the surgery
  - d. The surgeon can get a better grip on the organs
12. Reposable instruments:
  - a. Have a limited number of sterilization cycles
  - b. Cannot be re-sterilized
  - c. Have one or more reusable parts
  - d. None of the above
13. Which is an example of equipment used for access and exposure?
  - a. Laparoscopic grasper
  - b. Laparoscopic scissor
  - c. Laparoscopic bipolar forceps
  - d. Laparoscope
14. Prior to sterilization, all sharp laparoscopic instruments need to be:
  - a. Assembled before placing them in the tray
  - b. Dried with a lint-free towel
  - c. Tested for sharpness
  - d. Inspected by at least two experienced technicians
15. The current generation of laparoscopic instruments can be disassembled:
  - a. And can all be cleaned mechanically
  - b. But are still time-consuming and difficult to clean
  - c. So they do not need to be placed in protective racks or trays
  - d. And should be placed in a peel pack to keep the different parts together

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