

Caring for surgical wounds

Most surgical wounds are stitched to allow the edges of the wound to meet and to heal. The skin edges usually form a seal within a day or two of the operation. This time varies from person to person and from operation to operation.

This leaflet gives some guidelines on how to care for your wound at home.

Stitches, clips and staples

The medical term for stitches is sutures. Other methods of closing a wound are also used. These include clips, staples or special adhesives.

Some types of stitch are dissolvable and don't need to be removed (see below). Other types of stitches, clips and staples have to be removed by a nurse or doctor. If this is necessary, the hospital staff will arrange this during a follow-up appointment at the hospital. Alternatively, wound closures can be removed by your GP or by the community nurse.

Stitches, clips and staples are usually removed between 3 and 21 days after the operation, depending on the type of surgery you have had.

Dissolvable stitches

These can take several weeks to completely dissolve. During this time you may see small pieces of the stitch material poking out of the healing scar. Don't be tempted to pull on these, but wait until they fall out on their own.

If the stitches are causing you pain or discomfort, contact your GP or the hospital for advice.

Dressings

Not all surgical wounds need dressings. For those that do, the purposes of a dressing are:

- to promote the ideal condition for healing
- to absorb any leakage from the wound
- to protect the area until the incision line is healed
- to prevent stitches or clips catching on clothing

The original dressing can be left in place for up to two days providing that it is dry and not soaked with blood or any other liquid.

After this time, remove the dressing carefully. Avoid touching the incision line with your fingers.

The wound can then be left without a dressing if you wish. Some people prefer a dressing over the wound for protection, especially if clothing is going to rub against it.

The hospital will supply a replacement dressing for you to use at home.

Apply the dressing carefully following the diagram on the packaging if there is one. Avoid touching the inside of the dressing with your fingers.

Bathing and showering

It's usually possible for you to have a bath or a shower twenty-four hours after the operation. Your nurse at the hospital will advise you if this is not the case following your particular operation.

General points to note:

- showering is preferable to bathing
- remove any dressing before bathing or showering
- when showering, you can let the water gently splash on to the wound. However don't rub the wound, as this may cause pain and could delay the healing process
- only have a bath if your operation site can be kept out of the water. You must not soak the wound as this might soften the scar tissue and encourage the wound to open up
- always dry the wound thoroughly by patting it gently with a clean towel

Problems

Most surgical wounds heal fairly quickly without causing any problems.

However, if you are concerned about your wound, do not hesitate to contact the hospital.

You do need to advise us if your wound:

- becomes more painful
- looks red, inflamed or swollen
- smells unpleasant
- leaks any sort of liquid

Contacting us

If you still have any unanswered questions or concerns, please do feel free to raise them at any time when you come to the hospital.

Further information

Wounds1.com
<http://www.wounds1.com/>

Healthwise (Health Information Resource Centre)

Tel : (852) 2849 2400
Fax : (852) 2849 2900
Email : info@healthwise.org.hk
Homepage : www.healthwise.org.hk

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