

Patient Information - Wound care following minor surgery

Department of Dermatology

You have had minor surgery carried out today and it is important that you read the following instructions carefully. If you have any questions, please ask a member of staff at the Dermatology Clinic or telephone the Dermatology Helpline at the Hertford County Hospital on 01992 823012. Please note that it may take 4-6 weeks for any results to be available.

Name _____

You have _____ stitches in your wound.

These will need to be removed in _____ days' time.

Please make an appointment with the nurse at your GP's surgery for your stitches to be removed.

Work, exercise and other activities

As far as possible try to relax and take it easy following the surgery; after simpler procedures this should be for a few hours, and after larger procedures, a few days. You may need some time off work depending on the type of surgery you have had and the type of work that you do.

Any undue strain on the wound site, whilst you still have stitches, could cause it to open. Therefore, excessive physical activity, such as swimming, running, contact sports or going to the gym, should be avoided until the stitches are removed and the affected area has healed. Please avoid bending, straining or lifting heavy objects as these can cause bleeding to start or the wound to break open.

Pain

Post-operative pain varies for each person and depends on what sort of operation you have had. A painkiller, such as paracetamol (if you are not allergic to it) should control any discomfort. Do not take aspirin unless you are already taking this for another condition, in which case you should continue to do so as instructed. Aspirin and Ibuprofen are not recommended as they can cause the wound to bleed. If you have been prescribed antibiotics you should take them. If you are unsure, please ask the doctor or nurse

For the next few days, the wound may feel tender due to bruising and swelling around the surgical area, you may also feel a sharp pain occasionally as the wound heals. This will improve over the following days and is a normal part of the healing process. The area around the wound may be numb for a few weeks, and there could be some altered sensation to the area of skin in the long-term.

Scar

Any surgery to the skin will lead to some form of scar; the stitch line will look pink at first and the edges of the wound may look red. The stitches may appear raised in the first week, and the redness may take a few months to fade. You will have a permanent scar in this area which usually fades to a pale line. In some areas (especially on the shoulders, upper back and chest) there may be a thickened, red and possibly sore and/or itchy scar called a keloid scar. Keloid scars are difficult to treat but may improve with the application of topical steroid ointment or injections. Scars in some areas under tension may spread so that the resultant scar is wider than it was immediately after the operation. Little can be done to prevent this.

Bleeding

You might see a small amount of blood through the dressing. This is normal and if it does not increase you do not need to do anything further. If however, the bleeding continues, apply firm pressure with a clean cloth directly over the wound dressing for about 10 –15 minutes, this will usually be enough to stop any bleeding. Applying an ice pack to the area for 15 minutes can also help - a simple ice pack can be made by placing a bag of frozen peas into a dry plastic bag to avoid wetting the dressing. If the bleeding still continues, contact the Dermatology Department between the hours of 9am to 5pm. Outside of these working hours please call NHS 111 for advice.

When can I remove the dressing?

Keep the dressing on for 48 hours after surgery, unless advised otherwise by the nursing staff that the dressing needs to stay on longer. After this time carefully remove the dressing. If it is difficult to remove you may need to moisten the dressing to allow it to come off more easily. You can leave the operation site uncovered unless it is likely to get dirty or rubbed by clothing, in which case you should apply a light dressing or plaster. If you have steri-strips (adhesive paper strips) across the wound these will peel off gradually but can be left in place until the stitches are removed.

Washing

If the wound is covered with a dressing, you will need to keep this dry for the first 48 hours. If you wish to take a bath or shower after this time you may do so but remove the dressing first. Do not soak the wound under the water for long periods. Pat the area dry with a towel and replace the dressing if the area is catching on your clothes.

Signs of infection

As with any surgical procedure there is a risk of infections, and there is a small risk in skin surgery. Signs that your wound may have become infected usually begin 48 hours after surgery. You should seek help if you notice any of the following:

- Increased redness around the wound;
- The wound becomes more painful even after taking painkillers;
- The wound and surrounding skin becomes hot and starts to throb;
- The wound begins to leak, ooze or starts to bleed again;
- You have a raised temperature and feel generally unwell.

If you notice any of these signs and are worried you may have an infection you should contact your GP's surgery or call NHS 111 for further advice.

Contact details

Dermatology Department
Hertford County Hospital
North Road
Hertford
Hertfordshire SG14 1LP

Telephone: Dermatology secretary
Dermatology nurse helpline
Outpatient appointments

 01992 823012

 01992 823038

 01438 284444

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