

Bathing and showering

It's usually possible for you to have a bath or a shower about 48 to 72 hours after surgery, but this will depend on the particular operation you have - ask your nurse at the hospital for advice. Some general points to remember are:

- Showering is preferable to bathing, so that your wound doesn't soak in water.
- Remove any dressing before you have a bath or shower, unless your doctor gives you different advice. Some dressings are waterproof and can be left in place.
- Don't use any soap, shower gel, body lotion, talcum powder or other bathing products directly over your healing wound.
- You can let the shower water gently splash on to your healing wound, however don't rub the area as this might be painful and could delay the healing process.
- Only have a bath if your wound can be kept out of the water. Don't soak the area as this might soften the scar tissue and re-open your wound.

Dry the surrounding area carefully by patting it gently with a clean towel, but allow your wound to air dry.

Diet

Eating well can make a huge difference to your wounds and will encourage them to heal. Try to eat a varied diet and regular meals, unless you are on a restricted or special diet. Foods containing protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals will be particularly useful, for example, meat, nuts, eggs, lentils, fresh fruit and vegetables.

You're more likely to develop an infection if you:

- smoke
- have diabetes or a condition that affects healing
- have a condition or treatment that affects your immune system
- don't take proper care of your wound

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You can request this information in a different format or another language.

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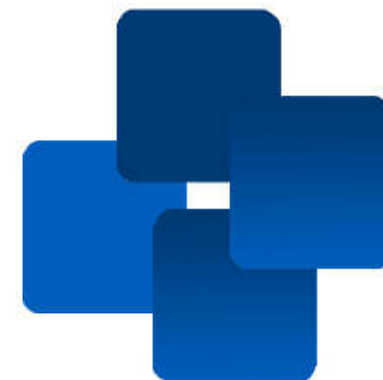
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Caring for your surgical wounds at home

Information for patients and carers



What is a surgical wound?

A surgical wound is the cut made into the skin during an operation. The position and size of the cut your surgeon makes will depend on the type of operation and surgery you have had.

At the end of the operation, the cut will be closed with stiches, clips, steri-strips or skin glue to bring the skin edges together to heal.

The skin edges usually form a seal within a day or two of the operation; however this will vary from person to person and from operation to operation. Closing your wound surgically encourages your wound to heal faster.

Wound healing

The process by which your surgical wound heals is complex and involves three main steps.

- Inflammation (slight redness) - this is the first stage of wound healing and results in increased blood flow to your wound area.
- Proliferation - new blood vessels grow to bring nutrients to your wound and remove dead tissue
- Maturation - new skin seals your wound and forms a scar.

Complications of wound healing - recognising infection

Most surgical wounds will heal without causing you any problems. However, some wounds may take time to heal. Your doctors and nurses will do everything they can to prevent your wound from becoming infected, but it's important that you know how to tell if you're developing an infection after you go home. If your wound becomes infected, you may experience some of the following symptoms:

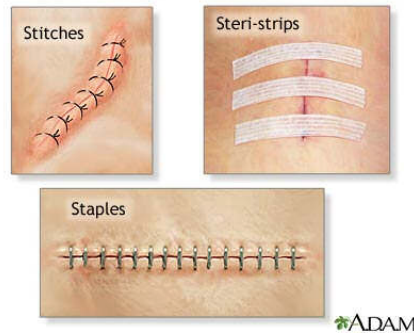
- become more painful
- look red, inflamed or swollen
- leak or weep liquid, pus or blood
- smell unpleasant
- you may develop a high temperature

If you develop an infection you may be treated with a course of antibiotics.

If you have any of the above symptoms telephone your ward at the Lister Hospital to get an appointment with the doctor - see contact details on reverse.

Stitches, staples and clips

Some stitches are dissolvable and you won't need to have them removed. Clips, staples and some types of stitches do need to be removed by a nurse or a doctor. If this is necessary, your nurse will arrange an appointment.



You will usually need to have stitches, clips and staples removed between 5 and 15 days after your treatment, depending on the type of operation you have had.

Caring for your wound

Dressings

Not all surgical wounds need dressings. The purpose of a dressing is to:

- absorb any leakage from your wound
- improve conditions for healing
- reduce the risk of infection
- protect the area until your wound has healed
- prevent stitches or clips from catching on clothing

Changing the dressing

You can leave the original dressing in place for up to five days (or as advised by your surgeon) providing that it's dry and not soaked with blood, and there are no signs of infection.

Before you remove and change the dressing:

- Wash your hands with soap and water
- Carefully take the dressing off
- Do not touch the healing wound with your fingers

If your wound is healing it can be left without a dressing. However, you might like to continue wearing a dressing over the area for protection, especially if your clothing rubs against it.

The hospital team will give you a replacement dressing for you to use at home. Apply the dressing carefully and don't touch the inside of it.