

Patient Information

Surgical Wound Care

Tissue Viability Service



Introduction

This leaflet gives you information and advice on caring for your surgical wound. There are different types of surgical wounds, so it's important to follow the specific advice you receive depending on the operation you have had.

Surgical wounds

A surgical wound is an incision (cut) made into the skin by a surgeon during an operation. At the end of the operation, the cut is closed to allow the skin edges to come together and heal. Sometimes sutures (stiches), metal clips or staples are used to keep the skin edges together. The skin edges usually form a seal within a day or two of the operation. The time this takes varies from person to person, and from operation to operation.

On rare occasions, a surgical wound is allowed to remain open (not stitched) and heals from the base of the wound up. If this is the plan for your wound, you will receive specific information from your surgical nursing and/or midwifery team prior to being discharged home.

Dressings

Most wounds will have a dressing applied and left in place for 48-72 hours after the operation. The purpose of the dressing is to:

- absorb any leakage from the wound
- provide ideal conditions for healing
- protect the area until the wound is healed
- prevent stitches or clips catching on clothing

Changing the dressing

The wound must be kept dry for at least 2 days. If the dressing becomes wet from blood or any other liquid, it must be changed. After 48-72 hours the wound can be left open to the air; provided it is not oozing. Depending on the position of the wound, you may find it more comfortable to have it covered with a simple dressing.

Should your wound require ongoing dressings when you are discharged home, the ward will give you a limited supply of dressings to take with you. You can then obtain more dressings from either your GP or district nurse.

Removal of stitches

Some stitches don't need to be removed because they dissolve, however, most types of stitches, clips or staples have to be removed by a nurse or doctor. They are usually removed between 5 and 21 days after treatment, depending on the type of operation you have had.

If you have been discharged you will need to arrange an appointment for your practice nurse to do this. Should you be house bound, the ward nurse/or midwife will arrange for a community nurse/midwife to visit you at home.

Infection

Try not to touch your wound as this can make a wound infection much more likely. However, if you have to touch your wound to care for it, always wash your hands before and after touching the wound area.

To remove and change the dressing:

- Wash your hands with soap and water
- Carefully take the dirty dressing off, then wash your hands again
- Do not touch the healing wound with your fingers
- Reapply the clean dressing

If you experience any of the following symptoms, please contact your practice nurse or GP:

- High temperature (fever)
- Increased redness, pain or swelling around the wound
- An offensive smell from the wound
- The wound feels hot
- Thick yellowy discharge leaking from the dressing
- Feeling generally unwell

Ongoing care of your wound

Don't expose your incision to direct sun for 3 to 9 months after surgery. As an incision heals, the new skin that is formed over the cut is very sensitive to sunlight and will burn more easily than normal skin. Bad scarring could occur if the new skin gets sunburned.

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