Dermatology department

Post-operative advice for patients who have had skin surgery

The following advice will help you to know what to expect after your skin surgery procedure. Please talk to the doctor or nurse if you have any other questions.

Will I have a dressing?
You will usually have a dressing which may vary in size depending on the type of surgery you have had. You will need to keep this in place for the first 24 to 48 hours after the surgery, and to keep it dry.

How long will the wound be painful for? What sort of pain?
You may feel some soreness after the anaesthetic has worn off. If this happens, you may take paracetamol (if you are not allergic to it). Aspirin or ibuprofen (Nurofen®) are not recommended as they can cause the wound to bleed. If you have been prescribed antibiotics, you should take them. They can be taken at the same time as paracetamol or codeine. If you are unsure, please ask the doctor or nurse.

What happens if my wound starts to bleed?
It is normal for a small amount of blood to come through the dressing, but if it does not stop and the dressing becomes saturated, you should press firmly over the dressing for fifteen minutes. This will usually be enough to stop any bleeding. If bleeding continues, you can try applying an ice pack to the bandaged area for fifteen minutes. (A simple ice pack can be made by placing a bag of frozen peas into a dry plastic bag, to avoid wetting the bandage). If bleeding still continues, you should contact your GP, Accident & Emergency, or this department (see contact details at the end of this leaflet).

What about the risk of infection?
As with any surgical procedure there is a risk of infection. For skin surgery this is an approximate risk of one in 20.

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:

- You have increased redness around the wound.
- The wound becoming more painful even after taking painkillers.
- The wound and surrounding skin feels hot and starts to throb.
- The wound begins leaking, oozing or starting to bleed again.
- You have a raised temperature and feel generally unwell.

If you notice any of these signs and are worried that you may have an infection you should contact your GP immediately as you may need a course of antibiotics. The telephone number for this department is at the end of this leaflet.
What about work, exercise and other activities?
You may need some time off work depending on the type of surgery you have had and the type of work you do. As far as possible you should relax and take it easy following the surgery. After simpler procedures this should be for a few hours and after larger procedures for a few days. The doctor or nurse should advise you at the time of your operation. It is quite normal for you to feel tired after an operation. You should avoid vigorous exercise such as swimming, running, contact sports or going to the gym, until the stitches have been removed and the affected area has healed. You should avoid bending, straining or lifting heavy objects as these can cause bleeding to start or the wound to break open.

When can I have a bath or shower?
You will need to keep the wound and dressing dry for 48 hours. After this you can take a bath or shower, but you should not hold the wound directly under the shower or soak it in the bath for a long time. Afterwards, you should dry the area by patting it gently with a towel rather than rubbing it dry.

When can I remove the dressing?
You should keep the dressing on for 24 to 48 hours. After this time, carefully remove the dressing. If it is difficult to remove, you may need to wet it to allow it to come off more easily. You can leave the operation site uncovered although if it is likely to get dirty or be rubbed by clothing you should apply a light dressing or plaster, which should be changed daily. If you have steri-strips (adhesive paper strips) across the wound, these will peel off gradually but can be left in place until your stitches are taken out.

When will the stitches be removed?
You have ............................................................... stitches
which should be removed by the practice nurse at your GP surgery/at clinic 7
in ........ days (Date for removal:   /   /  )

Will I have a scar?
Yes, most surgical procedures leave a scar. The stitch line will look pink at first, and the edges of the wound may look red. The stitches may look raised in the first week. The redness may take a few months to fade. You will have a permanent scar in this area – this usually fades to a pale line. Sometimes a raised, red, itchy scar called a keloid scar can develop. These occur more commonly on the shoulders, neck and chest and are also more likely to occur in dark skinned individuals. Keloid scars are difficult to treat but may improve with application of steroid ointment or injections.

What other things should I be aware of?
- In the first week your wound may feel tender and may bleed slightly.
- Your wound may be swollen and bruised, especially if it is on the face or around the eyes. This should settle down as the wound heals.
- The area around the wound may be numb for a few months.
- You may feel a sharp pain from time to time, as the wound heals.

All of the above as part of the normal healing process.
What happens to removed skin?
All skin specimens are sent to the laboratory and the pathologist’s report takes up to three weeks to complete and will be sent to your consultant. Sometimes we will ask for your permission to use the specimen(s) for research purposes, but this will only be done with your written consent.

When will I get my results?
You will either be given a clinic appointment to come and talk about the results, or one of the doctors may telephone you or write to you and your GP, to let you know the result. Please be aware that it may be up to six weeks before you receive the results.

Contacts/Further information
If you require wound care advice you can ring the clinic nurses on 01223 217391 and leave your name and hospital number (MRN) or NHS number.
However, please be aware that we are unable to give results over the phone.

We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site.
For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:
If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.
Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.