Infection Control Department

Caring for orthopaedic surgical wounds at home

General information for patients and carers

This leaflet gives you information and advice about how to care for your surgical wound once you get home.

There are different types of surgical wounds. So it is important to follow any particular, specialist advice from your surgeon or nurse when you leave hospital.

Surgical wounds

A surgical wound is the cut made into your skin by a doctor during an operation. At the end of the operation the cut is stitched internally and on the skin edges to allow it to heal.

Often metal clips are used to keep the skin edges together.

The skin edges usually form a seal within a couple of days after the operation but this can vary from person to person and depending on the type of operation you have had.

Caring for your wound

It is important to keep the wound dry until the clips or sutures are removed, which is normally 10-14 days after your operation. After that, it is preferable to shower rather than bathe for a couple of weeks.

We recommend that you pat the wound dry gently with a clean towel.

Do not put any soap, shower gel, body lotion, talcum powder or other bathing products directly onto the healing wound for about six weeks after your operation.

Dressings

Not all wounds need dressings. The purpose of a 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 from catching on clothing
**Stitches, Clips and Staples**

Stitches are also known as sutures. Metal clips (also known as staples) are another method used to close wounds. Adhesive dressings such as steristrips are commonly used.

Most stitches are dissolvable and clips are normally removed 10-14 days post operation. If you are told you need to have stitches or clips removed, your local practice nurse or GP can do this. You will need to make the appointment. If you are unable to get to your GP surgery, a district nurse visit could be arranged by your GP practice.

**Wound care advice after your operation**

Most wounds heal without complications. However a minority of wounds are complicated by infection. This occurs when germs enter the wound. These germs can delay normal wound healing. A surgical wound infection can develop at any time from two to three days after surgery until the wound has healed (usually two to three weeks after surgery). Very occasionally an infection can occur several months after an operation.

**Wound infections** are usually treated by redressing the wound regularly and may require a course of antibiotics. Sometimes further surgery is required.

Infection can develop after you leave hospital. Some swelling and redness are to be expected after surgery; however you may have an infection if you develop one or more of the following symptoms:

- if you develop a high temperature, feel generally unwell
- weep or leak some blood-like liquid, pus or blood at the wound site
- looks red and/or swollen around the wound site
- feels hot at the wound site
- has an unpleasant odour from the wound site
- becomes more painful from the wound site

If you notice any of the above or have any concerns about your wound, then please contact your GP, hospital orthopaedic consultant or hospital nurse specialist.

**Contacts/Further information**

You can contact the ward you were discharged from by calling Addenbrooke’s Hospital: **01223 245151**

If you have any questions, please ask the healthcare team who will be happy to discuss this with you.
References/ Sources of evidence
NICE clinical guideline No 74: Surgical site infection (October 2008); Department of Health: High Impact Intervention No 4: Care bundle to preventing surgical site infection (August 2007)


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For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

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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.

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