

Wound Care after Surgery

After surgery, you may have 1 or more incisions. Some people have 1 large incision and some have several small ones.

Here are some helpful hints for looking after your incision at home.

How are wounds closed?

There are many ways to close a wound. After surgery your doctor or nurse will tell you how your wound is closed and how to look after it.

Proper wound care is important to improve healing and prevent infection.

❑ Stitches:

Some wounds are closed with stitches. Some types of stitches dissolve on their own. Some types need to be taken out.

❑ Staples:

Metal clips hold the edges together. These need to be removed by a health care provider with a special tool.

❑ Paper tape:

Small strips of non-allergic tape are put across the wound to hold the edges together. This may be used alone or with stitches or staples.

❑ Adhesive glue:

This may be used on small wounds that are not very deep.

How long does healing take?

Healing depends on your general health and the type of surgery you had. Large or deep surgery incisions can take 6 to 8 weeks to heal. People with medical problems or prescribed certain medications may take longer.

How can I help healing?

Follow a healthy diet:

You can help healing by eating healthy. Follow a diet high in vitamin C, protein and zinc. Vitamin C is found in citrus fruits such as oranges and grapefruits. Vitamin C is also in vegetables such as broccoli and brussel sprouts.



Meat, fish and milk products are high in protein and zinc. Choose low fat protein. Your health care provider may want you to take multivitamins or nutritional supplements as well.



Follow your activity guidelines:

After some types of surgery you will be advised to avoid heavy lifting. This means you cannot lift anything over 10 pounds or 4 ½ kilograms. Heavy lifting can cause problems with healing. Follow the instructions you were given in the hospital.

Exercise and Activity:

Exercise and activity helps healing by improving blood flow. Blood brings oxygen and healthy nutrients to the cells in your body to help them heal.

Follow the instructions you have been given about the amount and type of exercise to do.

You may need to avoid straining and heavy lifting so your wound can heal.



How do I care for my wound?

Follow the directions you were given in the hospital. Keep the wound clean and dry for the first 72 hours. Your health care provider will tell you when you can shower. When having a shower, do not let the spray go directly onto any incision until it is well healed. Avoid baths, swimming pools and hot tubs until your incision is well healed.

Your incision may also be covered with a dressing made of gauze pads. In the hospital, your health care provider may look at your incision and change the dressing. You will learn what to look for and how to do it if you are going home with a dressing.

When you go home with a dressing:

Change the dressing as you were advised in the hospital. Wash your hands well with soap and warm water before and after touching the dressing. Then clean and apply the dressing as you were taught in the hospital.

If your incision is closed with paper tape:

- Paper tape may curl and peel.
- You can leave it alone until it falls off.

How should a wound feel?

You may have some pain or discomfort in the area. You will have pain control medication to take when needed. Pain should be less and less each day. If the pain gets worse rather than better, contact your surgeon, family doctor or health care provider. You may have an infection.

The wound may be itchy. This may be normal or a sign of a problem such as an infection or stitches that are too tight. Call your surgeon if the itching gets worse rather than better.

Please turn over →

What is a drain?

A drain is a thin tube put around the surgery site to remove extra fluid and tissue after surgery. The drain is attached to a collection container. Your nurse will check your drain, measure the drainage and empty it. If you are going home with a drain you will learn how to look after it. As you recover the drainage will change colour and get less and less. Your doctor will decide when the drain comes out.

Will I have a scar?

Yes. All wounds leave a scar. Scars are sensitive to the sun and can get sunburned. Keep scars covered or apply sunscreen. Lotions and skin softeners can also soften scars. Some scars fade over time and some do not.

When should I call my family doctor or health care provider?

Call your family doctor or health care provider right away if you have:

- a wound that is more red, swollen or hot
- a wound that has green or yellow drainage
- a wound that smells bad
- bleeding that does not stop with pressure
- pain that is not getting better
- a feeling of hardness or fullness around the wound
- any incision opens
- a fever over 38.3°C or 101°F

