

Patient information

Surgical Wound Management

Head and Neck and Dermatology Department - Aintree Hospital

Types of Wound

- Head and Neck wound.
- Split Skin Graft- Arm.
- Punch Biopsy.
- Excision Biopsy.
- Incisional Biopsy.
- Curettage and Cautery.

Following your procedure you will have a surgical wound. Following the general wound care advice given below will ensure the success of the treatment and is essential to encourage healing.

Types of Surgical Wound Closures

Most surgical wounds have stitches (dissolving or non-dissolving), metal clips (staples), steri-strips or glue.

Your wounds may have a mixture of all of the above depending on what your doctor thinks will be most appropriate.

Where the wound is will also determine how long stitches are in for.

In some cases the wound is left open to heal on its own; it may have a dressing over it or stitched onto the area to keep it clean and moist in case a further procedure is necessary once the doctor has seen the results of your biopsy.

The doctor will explain this to you either before or at the time of surgery.

You may be given a small tube of cream to apply to your wound to help prevent infection.

The cream will have 'eye ointment' written on it. This is not a mistake; apply to your surgical wound as instructed by your surgeon or nurse.

Stitches

- Dissolving stitches usually disappear in ten to fourteen days.
- Non dissolving stitches are removed depending on where they are and the clinician's instructions.
- Facial Wounds – five days.
- Scalp Wounds – seven to ten days.
- Arm / Hand Wounds – seven to ten days.
- Lower limb / Joint wounds – ten to fourteen days.
- Abdominal Surgical Wounds – seven to ten days.
- Metallic Clips or Staples are usually removed seven to ten days.
- Steri-strips are removed with warm water in five to seven days.
- Glue – does not require any form of removal post op.

Depending on the type of surgery the doctor or nurse will advise you on discharge when the clips or stitches are to be removed.

Observe the wound closely after removal of sutures or clips for wound breakdown or infections.

If you see nylon threads poking out of a healing scar, please do not pull on the stitches.

Wait for the stitches to dissolve or to be removed. However, if you're experiencing any pain around the stitches contact your G.P or the Clinic / ward for advice.

Signs of Infection

- Redness / Swelling.
- Heat around the wound.
- Pain.
- Discharge from the wound i.e. serous fluid, blood, puss (green colour).
- Unpleasant smell.

If you notice any of the above signs or symptoms contact your G.P, District nurse, local walk in centre or ring the clinic / ward for advice.

If you think it needs urgent medical review attend you're nearest walk in centre / Accident and Emergency Department.

Risk Factors Affecting the Wound Healing Process

Research shows that some people are at higher risk of developing wound infections than others due to:

- Smoking.
- Diabetes.
- Having a condition or treatment that affects their immune system such as leukaemia, chemotherapy or other immune suppressing drugs.
- Poor dietary intake.

Doctors and nurses will do everything to prevent your wound from becoming infected while you are in the hospital.

On discharge, you must take responsibility for looking after your wound and ensure that you know how and who to tell if you are developing an infection.

If your wound bleeds press on the wound firmly with a clean cloth without looking at it for approximately 15 minutes. If it is still bleeding after this time, seek medical attention.

Problems with Wound Healing

The majority of the wounds heal without any problems.

The time frame for wound healing varies from patient to patient. However, the most common complications following surgery are wound infections and wound breakdown.

This can usually be treated by a course of antibiotic and / or dressing the wound regularly with different types of dressings.

In some cases attendance at the Nurse Led Dressing Clinic or re-admission to hospital for further surgery may be needed.

Bathing and Showering

You're normally advised to wait for 24 hours before showering or bathing after sutures / clips removed.

- Showering is preferable to bathing.
- Only take a bath if you are sure to keep the wound dry. Soaking the wound might soften the scar tissue and re-open the wound.
- Never leave a wet dressing on. Preferably take a shower, the day the dressing is due to be changed.
- Do not put any soap, shower gel, body lotion, talcum powder or other bathing products directly on to the healing wound.
- Pat the wound gently dry with a clean towel after bathing or showering.

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