

# How to care for your wound at home

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## Information for patients

This leaflet provides information and advice on caring for your wound at home. There are different types of wounds, so it is important to follow any advice given on discharge.

### Wounds

Wounds may be stitched or metal clips or staples may be used to help hold the skin edges together and heal. The skin edges usually form a seal within a day or two but this varies depending on the person and the wound.

On rare occasions a wound may be allowed to remain open (not stitched) and heal from the base of the wound up. If this is the plan for your wound, you will receive specific information from your nursing team prior to discharge.

### Dressings

Not all wounds need dressings. The purpose of a dressing is to protect the area until the wound is healed and to:

- absorb any leakage from the wound
- provide ideal conditions for healing
- prevent stitches or clips catching on clothing

If your wound needs ongoing dressings when you are discharged, the ward will give you a limited supply. You can get more dressings from either your GP or district nurse if you need them.

### Stitches, clips and staples

Stitches are also known as sutures. Metal clips or staples are other methods used to close wounds. Adhesive dressings, glue, steri-strips or tapes may also be used. Most of these have to be removed by a nurse or doctor, but some stitches are dissolvable and don't need to be removed. If you are told you

need to have stitches removed, the nurse will give you a letter for your practice nurse and you will need to arrange an appointment for them to do this. If you are house bound, the nurse will arrange for a community nurse to visit you at home. Stitches, clips and staples are usually removed between 5 and 21 days after treatment, depending on your wound.

### **Tissue adhesive (skin glue)**

Wounds which are less than 5cm long can be glued with special skin glue. Although the glue is waterproof, try to keep the wound dry for about 5 days. The glue usually peels off in 5 to 10 days. For longer or larger skin cuts, glue can be used together with stitches to seal the wound.

### **Problems with wound healing**

Most wounds heal without any problems. However, the most common complication is wound infection. This means that germs have started to grow in the wound and this can delay normal wound healing. Wound infections are usually treated by dressing the wound regularly and sometimes with a course of antibiotics. Sometimes surgery may be needed. Some people are more likely to develop wound infections than others and the doctors will discuss this with you.

Those at higher risk include people who:

- smoke
- have diabetes
- have a condition or treatment that affects their immune system, such as leukaemia or chemotherapy
- have had a major operation, such as bowel surgery, where diet is not giving enough nutrients for wound healing

Doctors and nurses will do everything they can to prevent your wound from becoming infected while you are in hospital. It is important that you know how to tell if you are developing an infection after you go home.

If a wound becomes infected, it may:

- become more painful
- look red or swollen
- weep or leak some pus
- have an unpleasant smell

If you develop a high temperature, notice any of the signs above, or have any concerns about your wound, please contact your GP, district nurse or practice nurse. Wound infections can be treated successfully especially if we catch them early.

### **Caring for your wound**

There are a number of things you can do to help lower the chance of your wound getting infected and to promote healing.

### **Changing the dressing**

The original dressing should be left in place for up to two days (or as advised by the nurse or doctor), provided it is not oozing. The wound must be kept dry for two days. If the dressing becomes wet from blood or any other liquid, it must be changed.

Before you remove and change the dressing:

- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Carefully take the dirty dressing off.
- Do not touch the healing wound with your fingers.

If the wound is healing, it can be left without a dressing. Some people prefer to have a dressing to cover the wound for protection, especially when clothing can rub against it.

When applying a new dressing, take care not to touch the inside so that it stays clean. There is no need for antiseptic cream under the dressing. You can contact your GP, practice nurse or district nurse for assistance with managing your dressings.

### **Taking care of stitches**

Dissolvable stitches usually disappear in 7 to 10 days. Other stitches need to be removed after 5 to 21 days, depending on the wound.

You may see nylon threads (the ends of the stitches) poking out of the healing scar, please **do not** pull on these. If you are worried about the stitches, always seek advice from your GP. Otherwise wait for the stitches to be removed or for them to fall off or dissolve. If stitches continue to cause you pain or discomfort, contact your GP for advice.

### **Bathing and showering**

You are normally advised to wait 24 hours before showering, but this depends on your wound. The nurses will give you advice on this.

Below is some general advice on caring for your wound:

- Showering is preferable to bathing.
- Only have a bath if you are sure you can keep the wound dry. Soaking the wound might soften the scar tissue and re-open the wound. Salt baths are not needed.
- Some waterproof dressing can be left in place while you take a bath or shower. Other dressings may need to be removed before having a bath or shower.
- Do not put any soap, shower gel, body lotion, talcum powder or other bathing products directly onto the healing wound.
- Do not worry if you splash the wound, but do not rub the wound area as this will cause pain and might delay the healing process.
- Pat the wound gently with a clean towel after bathing or showering.
- If the surgery was performed on your face, please do not wear make-up over the scar until it has fully healed.

If you have any concerns about your wound or the dressing, you should contact your GP, district nurse or practice nurse.

## **How to contact us**

Telephone Brunel Short Stay Surgical Unit on 020 3299 3077 or 020 3299 2202.

## **Sharing your information**

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

## **Care provided by students**

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: [kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net)

You can also contact us by using our online form at [www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals](http://www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals)

**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.**

PL915 November 2020  
Review date November 2023

Urgent Care  
Corporate Comms: 2514