

Wound Care Instructions After Surgery

Like any other skin wound, a surgical wound needs time to heal. The body begins the healing process right away and improves steadily in the days and weeks following surgery. However, in some cases, surgical wounds do not heal properly due to infection of the surgical site or other underlying factors like age, quality of the skin, type of surgery, diabetes, smoking, obesity, chronic alcohol consumption, hypertension, poor circulation, propensity to keloid scarring, malnutrition, immunogenic response, etc

You will need to take care of your wound, to avoid infections and to limit scarring.

1. Keep the surgical wound dry for the first 24 to 48 hours, do not remove the sterile gauze dressing. A small amount of oozing or blood-tinged drainage in the first 24 to 48 hours is normal. After that, you can tend the wound as instructed. Wash your hands before and have all materials prepared.
2. Most small surgical skin wounds do not need washing with water or mild soap. Do not scrub or soak the wound (no bathtub or hot tub), do not use rubbing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide or iodine as they can harm the tissues and slow wound healing.
3. Starting at 48 hours after surgery until stitches are removed, apply petroleum jelly (Vaseline) or Polysporin ointment on the dry wound twice a day to keep the wound moist and prevent infections.
4. Before taking a shower, you may protect the surgical wound from regular soap, shampoo and skin debris by covering the wound with a piece of clean gauze and then a clear adhesive film of Tegaderm. Remember to remove them after your shower and gently apply the vaseline or polysporin ointment.
5. Most small surgical skin wounds can be left uncovered after 48 hours. If you work in a dirty environment (construction, warehouse) keep your wound covered with a non-stick bandage.
6. Avoid swimming or vigorous physical exercises or any activity that could stretch the skin and cause your wound to open.
7. Mild soreness for 1-3 days is expected. If you have pain or discomfort, you can use Acetaminophen. Avoid Aspirin, Ibuprofen or Naproxen for the first 48 hours as they can increase bruising and bleeding risk.
8. Do not remove the stitches on your own. Typically, stitches on thin, well vascularized skin will be removed in 5-7 days (face, hand, some areas on the neck) while the others

will be removed in 10-14 days. Removing the stitches too early can increase the risk of dehiscence (opening of the wound), while removing them too late increases the risk of poor scarring.

9. After stitches removal, apply on the surgical scar any of the following products: Mederma cream, Bio Oil, cocoa butter, vitamin E oil or silicone gel and gently massage the area 3 times a day 10-15 minutes to improve the skin remodelling and the scar appearance. The actual massage is the most important factor in skin remodelling, along with maintenance of moisture. In certain cases, applying a silicone sheet would be indicated. The darker pink discolouration of the surgical scar will fade in time, leaving a white silvery colour in people with light skin and a possible hyper-pigmented scar in people with darker skin. Scars mature over the course of 6 months to one year, the final appearance can be influenced during this period.

10. Use sun protection, preferably SPF 50 on the surgical scar as it will be sensitive to sun for 12 months and can get discoloured.

11. If you are not pleased with the appearance of your scar after 1 year, there are options. Some people do not scar well, some are prone to form keloid (thick, pigmented) scars. Certain areas are known for poor scarring (sternum, shoulder). While not all scars can be fixed, most can be improved even after they have matured. Steroid topical creams/ ointments or scar injections, laser, micro-needling, microdermabrasion, Botox injections, dermal fillers, cryotherapy or surgical scar revision can significantly improve the appearance of scars but can never erase them.

When to call the doctor:

- If you have increasing swelling, redness, pain and warmth at the surgical site.
- If you have yellow drainage from the wound or notice a foul odour.
- If you develop fever or chills several days after surgery
- If you have bleeding that is not controlled with light pressure.

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