

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 and other chronic conditions.

You will need to take care of your surgical wound as it heals to avoid pain or discomfort, 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. After this, you can clean the wound if you were instructed to do so. Make sure you wash your hands before and have all materials prepared.
2. Most small surgical wounds do not need cleaning, but if you were specifically instructed to clean your wound, do so with warm water twice a day to gently remove the scab (which actually increases the build up of scar tissue).
3. Do not scrub or soak the wound (as in bathtub), do not use rubbing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or iodine as they can harm the tissues and slow wound healing.
4. If you need to take a shower, you may protect the surgical wound from regular soap and skin dirt by covering the wound with a piece of clean gauze on top of the stitches and then a clear film of Tegaderm on top of the gauze. Remember to remove them after your shower and gently tend to your wound then.
5. Pat dry the wound after washing, with a clean dry gauze or towel.
6. Apply petroleum jelly (Vaseline) or Polysporin ointment on the dry wound twice a day to keep the wound moist and prevent infections.
7. Most small surgical 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.
8. Avoid any activity that could stretch the skin and cause your wound to reopen.
9. If you have pain or discomfort, you can use Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen as needed.
10. 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. At the stitch removal visit, the doctor will assess the surgical wound for healing and review with you the scar treatment.

11. Keep hydrated. Drink 1-1.5 L of fluids a day to help the surgical wound healing.
12. After stitch 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 colour 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.
13. Use sun protection, preferably SPF 50 on the surgical scar as it will be sensitive to sun for 6 months and can get red with sun exposure.
14. If you have done all of the above and still are not pleased with the appearance of your scar after 1 year, do not worry - there are options. Some people do not scar well, some are prone to form keloid scars. Certain areas in the body are notorious for poor scarring (joints, sternum, shoulder, shins). While not all scars can be fixed, most can be improved even after they have matured. Laser, dermabrasion, micro-needling, Botox injections, dermal fillers, steroid injections, chemical peels, 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.
- If you have any problems with your vision (if the wound is around your eyes or on the forehead) or tingling, numbness at the surgical wound.
- If you develop redness and swelling around the wound that persists or worsens after a couple days (a darker pink colour on the surgical scar is normal).
- If you have pain that is worsening or not relieved by medication.
- If you develop fever or chills.
- If you have yellow, green or white drainage from the wound or notice a foul odour.
- If you have tissue that turns dark purple or black (there is normal to have a very mild scab on the wound).
- If you have bleeding that is not controlled with light pressure.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your condition.

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