



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Caring for Your Wound after Your Skin Procedure With Sutures

This information explains how to care for your wound after your skin procedure with sutures (stitches).

You had a procedure to remove a concerning lesion on your skin. Caring for your wound after your skin procedure is important to help prevent infection and help you heal with little pain or discomfort.

Caring for Your Wound at Home

- Leave the bandage on your wound for _____ hours after your procedure. Keep it clean and dry.
- Remove your bandage after _____ hours.
- If your doctor or nurse told you to ice your wound, you can put an ice pack on your wound every hour you're awake for _____ minutes. Do this during the first 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days) after your procedure. This will help reduce bleeding, pain, and swelling.
- If you have Steri-Strips™ (tape strips) over your wound, don't take them off. They will slowly fall off on their own during the first week after your procedure.
 - The edges of the Steri-Strips will start to curl up on the edges first. Use scissors to trim the edges as they peel up.
 - It's normal to see dried blood on the Steri-Strips.
 - If your doctor or nurse told you to leave them on until your follow-up appointment, don't remove them.

- You can shower _____ hours after your procedure. Your healthcare provider may ask you to keep your Steri-Strips dry until your next visit.
 - Let the shower stream run gently over your wound.
 - Pat your wound dry with a clean gauze pad or clean, dry washcloth.
 - Don't take a bath, go swimming, or go into a hot tub until your wound is healed.

Cleaning your wound

Clean your wound every day. Do this for _____ days/weeks after your procedure, or until your follow up appointment. Follow the instructions below when you clean your wound.

Supplies

You will need the following supplies to clean your wound:

- One package of cotton swabs (Q-tips®)
- One package of nonstick gauze pads
- Paper tape
- Adhesive bandage (Band-aid®) cut to fit the wound size
- _____ solution
- _____ ointment
- Clean gauze pad or clean, dry washcloth

Instructions for cleaning your wound

1. Gather your supplies.
2. Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
3. Clean your wound with _____ solution.
4. Gently pat your wound dry with a clean gauze pad or clean, dry washcloth. Don't rub the area.
5. Use cotton swabs to put _____ ointment on your wound.

6. Cover your wound with nonstick gauze or an adhesive bandage (Band-aid) cut to the size of your wound. If you use nonstick gauze, keep it in place with paper tape.
7. When you're done, wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Follow these instructions for _____ days/weeks or until your wound is healed.

Additional instructions:

Managing Pain After Your Procedure

You may have pain or discomfort after your procedure. To help with this, take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or extra-strength acetaminophen (Extra Strength Tylenol®).

- Don't take aspirin or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®). These medications make it harder for your blood to clot, which may increase bleeding.
- Follow the dose directions on the package. If this dose doesn't help with your pain, call your doctor's office.
- If you're allergic to acetaminophen or if you can't take it due to a medical condition, ask your healthcare provider what you can take instead.
- If you're in a cancer treatment clinical trial, ask your oncologist (cancer doctor) about what pain medications you can take.
- You can also hold an ice pack over your wound to reduce pain, swelling, and bruising. Place an ice pack on your wound for 15 to 20 minutes every hour or as told by your healthcare provider.

Bleeding and Bruising After Your Procedure

- You may have swelling and bruising after your procedure. This usually goes away after _____ days.
- If bleeding does occur, press firmly on your wound with a clean gauze pad for _____ minutes. A cold compress will also help decrease the bleeding. If the bleeding doesn't stop after applying pressure, call _____ (emergency line).
 - If your wound is above your neck, apply pressure to the site, sit down and raise your head slightly with pillows. If your wound is on your arm or leg, apply pressure to the site, and elevate your arm or leg above your chest level.

Activities

- Don't do strenuous exercise, such as running or heavy lifting, for _____ weeks.
- Ask your doctor or nurse when you can lift objects heavier than 5 pounds (2.3 kilograms). You may be able to do this right away after your procedure, or you may need to wait until it's safe for you.
- Check with your doctor or nurses before starting any gym activity such as running, jogging, or lifting weights.
- If your skin procedure was on your neck, face, back, or scalp, don't repeatedly bend at your waist until your sutures are removed. Your doctor may tell you to wait _____ weeks.
- Don't let your wound be underwater (such as in a swimming pool, bathtub, or hot tub) until the sutures are removed, and it's fully healed.

Sleeping

- If your skin procedure was above your neck, sleep with the head of your bed raised 45 degrees for the first _____ days after your procedure. You can do this by sleeping with 2 pillows under your head.
- If your skin procedure was on 1 of your arms or legs, sleep with that body

part raised above the level of your heart. You can do this by resting your arm or leg on pillows.

- Ask your nurse if you need to avoid lying on your wound or putting any pressure on it for the first 48 hours. Doing this can help reduce irritation and bleeding.

Healing Process

You may have discoloration (pinkness or redness) at the site of your wound for up to 1 year after your procedure. Some people may have it for even longer.

Once your wound has healed, put a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 on the area. This will help protect the scar from sun exposure.

Suture Removal

- If you have non-dissolvable sutures, you will need to go back to your doctor's office to have your sutures removed. Schedule your suture removal appointment in _____ days/weeks.
- If you have dissolvable sutures, they will dissolve on their own. This may take up to 1 or 2 months.
 - Continue to check the sutures until they're dissolved. They may look like a small piece of white string at your wound. If the sutures aren't bothering you, let them dissolve completely. If the sutures start to bother you, call your doctor's office.

When to Call Your Healthcare Provider:

Call your healthcare provider if you have any of the following:

- A fever of 100.4° F (38 ° C) or higher
- Chills (feeling cold and shivering)
- Any of the following symptoms at your wound or the area around it:
 - Increasing redness or swelling
 - Increasing pain or discomfort

- Skin that's hard, warm, or hot to the touch
- Bright yellow or green drainage
- Bleeding that doesn't stop after putting pressure on the area for 30 minutes
- Bad odor (smell)
- The wound appears to have opened
- Rash
- Blistering
- Drainage that goes through your bandage
- Any questions or unexpected problems

If you have any questions or concerns, talk with a member of your healthcare team. You can reach them Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM at _____. After 5:00 PM, during the weekend, and on holidays, please call _____. If there's no number listed, or you're not sure, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Caring for Your Wound after Your Skin Procedure With Sutures - Last updated on December 20, 2019

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