

How to Care for Your Incision

When do I remove the bandage?

Your bandage should be removed the day after surgery. Your doctor may ask you to replace your bandage each day. Most wounds don't require a bandage after a few days, but you may decide to wear a bandage to protect the incision.

The incision is red. Is this normal?

The edges of a healing incision may be slightly red. Redness is normal, but call your doctor if the redness is increasing or if it spreads more than half an inch from the wound. Call your doctor if you see pus in the incision or if the incision is more than mildly tender or painful.

Your doctor may ask you to put an antibiotic cream on the incision. You can buy some antibiotic creams without a prescription. Apply the cream twice a day.

What do I do if the incision bleeds?

If your bandage becomes bloody, replace it with dry gauze or another bandage. Applying pressure directly to the incision for a few minutes stops most bleeding. If the wound keeps bleeding after you apply pressure, call your doctor.

Do I need to keep the incision dry?

Keep your incision clean and dry for the first 24 hours. Avoid showering or bathing the first day. Try taking a sponge bath instead. You may wash with soap and water by the second day. Take a shower instead of a bath if you have stitches or skin tape on your incision. Gently towel dry the incision after washing.

Will the stitches be removed?

Your doctor will remove stitches that don't absorb into the tissues. Deep stitches are absorbed by your body gradually and don't need to be removed. Most stitches are removed in three days to three weeks after surgery, depending on where they're located and how quickly you heal.

Your doctor may apply skin tape after the stitches are removed. Skin tape provides additional wound support. The tape can be removed in three to seven days. Healing skin may need months to regain most of its strength.

Should I limit my activities?

Limiting movement of your incision improves healing. Avoid activities that could cause your scar to pull apart. Your doctor may ask you to avoid lifting, straining, exercise or sports for the first month after surgery. Contact your doctor if the incision pulls apart.

Should I avoid sun exposure?

A healing scar will darken and become more noticeable if it gets sunburned. Limit your sun exposure for the first six months after surgery. When you go outdoors during the day, cover your scar with tape or sunscreen.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



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