

CARING FOR SURGICAL WOUNDS

Joining the edges of an incision together with stiches helps ensuring a faster wound healing. The edges of the wound seal tightly together and the wound is usually considered closed for the external environment within 24–48 hours. An incision closed using stiches is usually covered with a wound dressing or plaster; if necessary, a dry wound may be left without a dressing/plaster. Correct wound care helps ensure wound healing without any problems.

Wound care

- Keep the wound clean and dry to facilitate healing and prevent the wound becoming infected.
- You may change or remove the dressing/plaster applied over the wound after 24 hours or in accordance with the instructions given by the doctor/nurse.
- Then, change the dressing/plaster depending on the condition of the wound and in accordance with the manual of the wound care product and the instructions given by the doctor/nurse, or keep the wound covered with a dressing/plaster until the stiches are removed.
- Avoid too frequent changing of dressing; however, change the dressing/plaster immediately if it is soaked with blood or other wound discharge, or it has come off the wound. If necessary, contact the doctor or nurse.
- Changing a dressing:
 - prepare supplies you need for caring for the wound;
 - wash your hands before and after changing the dressing;
 - carefully remove the dressing/plaster from the wound;
 - clean the wound as the doctor has instructed, e.g., use a 0.9% NaCl solution or an antiseptic intended for wounds/mucous membrane;
 - place a new dressing/plaster over the wound.

Washing

- You may take a shower 2–3 days after the surgery or in accordance with the instructions given by the doctor/nurse:
 - before showering, remove the dressing/plaster, unless the dressing/plaster is waterproof;
 - wash the wound with running tepid water;
 - air-dry the wound and the skin around the wound or gently pat it dry with a clean gauze but avoid rubbing;
 - after washing, reapply a new dressing/plaster to the wound or leave the wound without a dressing.
- Then, you may shower as necessary or in accordance with the instructions given by the doctor/nurse.
- If a drain was placed into the wound, showering is not permitted until the drain has been removed and the opening has closed, or in accordance with the instructions given by the doctor/nurse.

Checking the wound

- When the wound causes pain, take the painkiller prescribed by the doctor.
- To reduce swelling and pain in the wound area:
 - hold your limb higher up if the wound is on your arm/leg;
 - place a cold thermal bag wrapped into a cloth on the wound for approximately 20 minutes at a time within two hours. This may be done with the doctor's permission.
- Reopening of the wound is possible when stiches are still in place or after the stiches have been removed. Therefore, please be extremely careful if the wound is on a moving part of your body – keep the area of the wound stress-free, avoid lifting heavy items, and limit physical activity for at least 2 weeks after the surgery, or in accordance with the instructions given by the doctor.
- You may notice that the wound is tingling, tender, or numb, it may be slightly higher than the skin, or look red, it may itch or there may be bruising around the wound – these are all normal symptoms that occur in case of a surgical wound.

- Please contact the doctor if:
 - there is persistent redness, swelling, and pain in the wound area and the wound is hot;
 - there is bleeding, wound or pus discharge has increased, and unpleasant odour is coming from the wound;
 - your body temperature rises over 37.5° C;
 - you have general weakness and feel unwell;
 - the wound opens up.

Wound care and washing after removal of stiches

- The treating doctor determines the time when the stiches are removed.
- Absorbable stiches dissolve in a week up to several months depending on the stitching material.
- Non-absorbable stiches are usually removed on the fourteenth day after the surgery and, if necessary, later.
- After the stiches have been removed, the wound is applied a dressing/plaster, if necessary, which may be removed after 24 hours and usually it is not required to cover the wound with a dressing/plaster.
- On the day your stiches are removed, please do not make the wound wet to ensure the closing of the openings. Then, you may take a bath, go to sauna, and swim.
- A surgical wound heals in 2 weeks.
- A healing wound is tender for weeks – protect the wound area from external injuries and avoid rubbing the wound against tight clothes. If you wish, you may cover the wound with a dressing/plaster during this time.

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Instructions for patients were approved by the Nursing Quality Committee of the North Estonia Medical Centre on 21 May 2020.