

Care of an Incision Line (Suture Line)

As a result of your surgery, you have a suture line(s). Some sutures are dissolvable and some need to be removed by your doctor or your nurse.

Purpose:

Skin is your body's first defense against infection. The suture line (scar line) is a break in that defense. Therefore, it is a route of possible infection. It is important to keep the suture line as clean as possible to prevent infection.

Supplies:

- Two packages of sterile 4" x 4" gauze
- One bottle of normal saline
- Bacitracin® ointment (if prescribed by your doctor)

Follow These Steps While You Are Not Allowed to Shower:

1. Wash a table top with soap and water; dry it and assemble your supplies.
2. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
3. Open the sterile 4" x 4" gauze package. Be careful not to touch the gauze pad.
4. Pour normal saline from the bottle onto the center of one package of gauze.
5. Remove the old dressing (if there is one). In good light, check the suture line for redness, swelling, and drainage. Use a mirror if you need it.
6. Pick up one gauze, wet with normal saline, by the corners.
7. Use light pressure and clean the suture line(s) by wiping smoothly from one end of the line to the other. If the suture line goes up and down, clean it starting at the top and wipe down the suture line.
8. Repeat steps 6 and 7 using a second gauze pad.
9. If there is more than one suture line, repeat steps 7 and 8 for each one.
10. Dry all suture lines with dry gauze. Pat dry; do not rub.
11. Your doctor may have prescribed Bacitracin ointment. If so, apply a small amount on all suture lines.
12. Keep the suture line(s) open to the air unless there is drainage. Cover the drainage site(s) with dry gauze. Secure with paper tape if needed.

Follow These Steps When You Are Allowed to Shower:

- Shower daily. Check the temperature of water with your skin. Check it on an unoperated area. A suture line can be numb for weeks after surgery. Checking with an area of skin that was not operated on will prevent burns.

- Gently wash the suture line(s) with mild nonperfumed soap (Ivory[®], Neutrogena[®]). Use your hands only. Rinse the area well and pat it dry with a clean towel; do not rub.
- Inspect the suture line(s) in good light. Use a mirror if necessary. For a few weeks after surgery it is normal to see:
 - Slight redness.
 - Swelling.
 - Discoloration (black and blue).
- Your doctor may have prescribed Bacitracin ointment. If so, apply a small amount on all suture lines.
- Keep suture the line(s) open to the air unless there is drainage. Cover the draining site(s) with dry gauze. Secure it with tape if necessary.
- If the drainage occurs between showers, clean the draining site(s) with gauze. Wet the gauze with normal saline. Pat dry and apply a small amount of Bacitracin ointment (if prescribed by your doctor). Cover with dry gauze.

Key Points:

- Avoid clothing that will rub on or irritate the suture line(s).
- Avoid direct exposure to the sun. You can apply sunscreen only after the sutures are removed and the area is healed. Use PABA-free sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher.
- Do not apply any of the following until the suture lines are healed:
 - Makeup
 - Perfume
 - Deodorant
 - Products that have alcohol
- If you need to shave, use an electric shaver around the suture line area(s). This will avoid irritation to the healing suture line(s).

Call Your Doctor If You Notice:

- An increased area of redness and/or swelling around the suture line(s).
- Increased discomfort around the suture line(s).
- Skin that is warm or hot to touch around the suture line(s).
- New or excessive drainage from suture line(s).
- Temperature above 101° F (38.3° C).

Doctor _____ Telephone _____

Nurse _____ Telephone _____

After 5 p.m. or on weekends, call (212) 639-7900. Ask for your doctor or the doctor on call.



Memorial Sloan-Kettering
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