Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

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).

Caring for your wound after your skin procedure is important to help prevent infection and help your wound heal.

Caring for your wound at home

- Leave the bandage on your wound for _____ hours after your procedure. Keep it clean and dry.
- Take off your bandage after _____ hours.
- If your healthcare provider 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.

Steri-strips

- If you have Steri-Strips™ (tape strips) over your wound, do not 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 first. Use scissors to trim the edges as they peel up. If the Steri-strips do not fall off on their own, you can gently peel them off.
  - It's normal to see dried blood on the Steri-Strips.
  - Your healthcare provider may tell you to leave the Steri-Strips on until

your follow-up appointment. If they did, do not take them off.

- 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 and soap run gently over your wound.
  - Pat your wound dry with a clean gauze pad or clean, dry washcloth.
  - Do not 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 these supplies to clean your wound:

- 1 package of cotton swabs (Q-tips®)
- 1 package of nonstick gauze pads
- Paper tape
- An adhesive (sticky) bandage (such as a 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.

Do not 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.

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®).

- Follow the dose directions on the package. If this dose doesn't help with your pain, call your healthcare provider's office.
- If you're allergic to acetaminophen or can't take it due to a medical condition, ask your healthcare provider what you can take instead.
- 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.

Only take aspirin or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®), if your healthcare provider says you can. These medicines make it harder for your blood to clot, which may increase bleeding.

If you're in a cancer treatment clinical trial, ask your oncologist (cancer doctor) about what pain medicines you can take.

Bleeding and bruising after your procedure

- You may have swelling and bruising after your procedure. This usually goes away after ____ days.
- If your wound starts bleeding, 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

- Do not do strenuous exercise (exercise that takes lots of effort, such as running or heavy lifting) for _____ weeks.
- Ask your healthcare provider 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 healthcare providers before starting any gym activity such as running, jogging, or lifting weights.
- If your skin procedure was on your neck, face, back, or scalp, do not repeatedly bend at your waist until your sutures are removed. Your healthcare provider may tell you to wait _____ weeks.
- Do not let your wound be underwater (such as in a swimming pool, bathtub, or hot tub) until the sutures are removed and your wound is 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 your arm or leg, 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 healthcare provider'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 become irritated or inflamed, call your healthcare provider's office.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider if you have any of these:

- A fever of 100.4° F (38 ° C) or higher
- Chills (feeling cold and shivering)
- Any of these 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 (leaking) that goes through your bandage
- Any questions or unexpected problems

If you have any questions or concerns, talk with a member of your care team. You can reach them Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at _____. After 5:00 p.m., 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.

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