

General surgery

Wound care advice after emergency general surgery

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information and advice on how to manage and monitor your surgical wound (incision) once discharged from the hospital. Caring for your wound is important to promote healing, prevent infections and reduce the risk of complications.

What type of wound do I have?

Healthcare staff will fill out the details below:

- ☐ Laparotomy (long incision in the middle of the abdomen; used in open surgery)
- ☐ Laparoscopy (keyhole; small incisions used in minimally invasive operations)
- ☐ Drain-site (small incision through which a tube, called a drain, is placed)

How was my wound closed?

Healthcare staff will fill out the details below:

- ☐ Absorbable stitches
- ☐ Non-absorbable stitches
- ☐ Skin glue
- ☐ Adhesive dressing (bandage)
- ☐ Skin Clips

Please read the correct sections for your wound.

1. How should I clean my wound?

Whichever type of surgical wound you have, you should keep your wound dry during the first 48 hours following your operation. Avoid touching the dressing on the wound during this timeframe. It is normal to see some spotting on the dressing. However, if your dressing is soaked because the wound is oozing, you should seek medical attention. This is so that the healthcare team can assess your wound and change the dressing appropriately.

You can shower safely 48 hours after your operation. Don't soak the wound (e.g. in a bath or swimming pool) for at least 7 days after. You can change the dressing on the wound yourself after 48 hours, or remove the dressing altogether if the wound is dry.

2. What should I do if I have stitches?

If you have **absorbable stitches**, they will dissolve/fall on their own and do not need to be removed. You may see some loose threads, please do not pull or tug on them, they will disappear on their own with time.

If you have **non-absorbable stitches**, you will need to visit your GP or any walk-in centre to have them removed. The team looking after you (doctors and nurses) will tell you the timeframe you need to do this in.

You will also have a simple dressing on top of your wound. Keep the area dry for at least 48 hours after your operation and change the dressing regularly. The team looking after you (doctors and nurses) will tell you how regularly to change it.

Once the wound is dry, you don't need the dressing anymore. However, if the stitches rub against your clothes, you can get a protective dressing from a pharmacy, your GP or a walk-in centre.

3. What should I do if I have skin glue?

If we closed your wound with skin glue, you will notice a shiny adhesive film on your wound. Keep the area completely dry for the first 24 hours and don't soak the wound for 7 days (i.e. avoid having a bath or swimming).

Do not scratch, rub, or pick at the adhesive film. The glue will fall off on its own, this can take up to 4 weeks.

4. What should I do if I have skin clips?

If we closed your wound with clips, they will have to be removed 10 days after your operation; your doctor will tell you the exact timeframe. They can be removed at your GP practice or any walk-in centre. You should be given a clip remover to take home with you when you are discharged from the hospital.

You will also have a dressing on top of the clips, and the team looking after you (doctors and nurses) will tell you how often you should change it. Once the wound is dry, you don't need to use the dressing anymore. However, you might want to use one for protection, for example if

the clips are rubbing against your clothes. You can get them from a pharmacy, your GP or a walk-in centre.

5. What should I do if I have dressings in place?

Keep the dressings clean and dry. Change the dressing if it gets soaked or dirty because of blood or other wound discharge. The team looking after you (doctors and nurses) will tell you how often you need to change your dressing.

Good hand hygiene is important when changing the dressings of your wound, as it reduces the risk of wound infection. Please follow these steps:

- Wash your hands with soap and water before you remove the old dressing.
- Carefully take the old dressing off.
- Wash your hands again.
- Gently clean the wound with tap water and pat dry. Avoid rubbing the wound.
- If the wound is dry and healing well, you do not need to use another dressing. However, if the healing wound rubs against clothes, you can put a dressing on top to protect it.
- If the wound isn't dry yet, use a new dressing. Take care not to touch the inside so that it stays clean.

6. What are the potential complications and what signs should I look out for?

Most wounds heal without any problems, but it is important to recognise a complication by looking out for the following signs:

1. Wound infection

- Increased redness, swelling or warmth around the wound
- Increasing pain around the wound
- Discharge of yellow, green or foul-smelling liquid
- Fever or chills

2. Opening of the wound (wound dehiscence)

- Separation of the edges of the wound (part of the wound or the whole wound is open)

3. Hernia

- Lump near the wound site which becomes more noticeable when you cough or strain
- Develops several weeks/months after your operation

If you notice any of the above signs, please get urgent medical attention using the details in section 8.

7. What can I do to help my wound heal?

- Use good hand hygiene when handling your wound.
- Protect your wound from direct sunlight to avoid hyperpigmentation and scarring.
- Avoid lifting heavy weights and strenuous activity. Your doctor can give you a sick note if you need one, typically advising 14 days of rest.

- Avoid driving during the first 10 to 14 days post-surgery. You can start driving again once you're comfortable performing an emergency stop without pain or restriction.

8. Who should I contact if I am concerned about my wound?

Please contact your GP, dial 111 or attend your nearest Emergency Department if you're worried. You can also contact our Surgical Assessment Unit (SAU) on 020 3312 1881 at St. Mary's Hospital.

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

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General surgery
Published: August 2025
Review date: August 2028
Reference no: 5287
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