

## PATIENT INFORMATION

# Wound care advice following your abdominal surgery

### **Wounds:**

Surgical wounds may be stitched, clipped with metal staples or glued to hold the edges together whilst they begin to heal.

On some occasions a wound may be left open (not stitched) to heal from the base upwards. This is often the case for a wound where a drain was placed.

The time a wound takes to heal varies greatly from person to person and depends on the operation you have had and your age, health and diet.

### **Stitches and clips/staples**

Stitches, otherwise known as sutures, come in a variety of materials. Some of which are dissolvable and others which will need removing by your GP practice nurse or a district nurse if you are housebound. If the stitches are clear, then it is likely they will self-dissolve. If they are black, they will need removing. Removal is usually 10-14 days after they were inserted.

### **Skin glue**

Glue may be used to close small wounds. Often it is used in addition to dissolvable stitches to help seal a wound and protect it. The glue will start to peel off after 5-10 days (although it can take a few weeks). Please do not pick at the glue, it will fall off naturally.

### **Dressings**

Not all surgical wounds require a dressing. The purpose of a dressing is to absorb any fluid weeping from the wound, protect the area whilst healing occurs, apply pressure to a wound (if required).

The original dressing should be left in place for 2 days, providing the wound is not oozing. If the dressing becomes wet from blood or any other liquid, it can be changed. The ward should supply you with some spare dressings. Others can be obtained from your local pharmacy.

When you change a dressing, make sure you wash your hands before and afterwards. Do not touch the healing wound with your fingers.

### **Will my wound bleed:**

If your wound starts to bleed when you are discharged home, you can apply pressure to the area with a dry tissue, clean handkerchief or swabs for 10 minutes. If it does not stop bleeding after 10 minutes you can try a cold compress, e.g a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a towel for a further 10 minutes. If the bleeding does not stop or is excessive, please contact 111, specialist team at the hospital or A&E for further advice.

### **Bathing and showering:**

You will normally be advised to wait 24 hours before showering, but this depends on your wound. The nurses will advise you if this is different.

Showering is preferable to bathing. Only have a bath if you are sure you can keep the wound dry as soaking it may soften the scar and cause it to open up. It can also be an infection risk.

Some dressings are waterproof and can be left on during showering, others may need changing afterwards. If you have skin glue on the wound, it is fine to get this wet. Pat the area dry after your shower.

### **Do not worry about.**

- Mild redness around the wound. This is common and part of the healing process.
- Thin clear or yellowish fluid leaking from the wound. This is normal. You may wish to cover the wound with a dressing to absorb this to protect your clothing.
- You may experience some pain around the wound. This should gradually improve over time.

### **When should I be worried?**

Look out for signs of infection, this includes:

- Redness around the wound which is getting worse/spreading
- The area around the wound feels hot to touch.
- Pus oozing from the wound (usually thick yellow/green fluid)
- Unpleasant smell coming from the wound.
- Increasing pain or swelling
- Fever, or feeling generally unwell along with these other signs.

If you are worried, you should contact your GP surgery, specialist nurse team (if you have one) or 111.

### **Other things you can do to help yourself:**

- Keep the wound area clean. Do not pick it.
- Eat a healthy well-balanced diet and keep hydrated.
- Take painkillers to help with any pain or discomfort.
- If you have been given antibiotics, ensure you take them as prescribed and finish the course.

- Avoid swimming or using hot tubs until the wound is healed.
- Once it has healed, you may wish to massage it with a water-based lotion which helps to break down scar tissue and reduce pain.

### **How can I tell my wound is healing?**

Wounds heal in stages. It may become slightly swollen, pink and tender and have some clear fluid oozing. This fluid cleans the wound. You may also get a scab that forms, this is your bodies way of helping to protect the wound.

As the wound heals it will get smaller as the edges pull inward. It may also become itchy. Try not to scratch it.

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For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.