

How to care for a wound closed with stitches or staples after an injury

Emergency Department

Information for Patients

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Introduction

Stitches or staples have been used to close your wound. These are used for deeper, larger wounds or wounds in areas that are mobile. Most wounds are stitched but staples may have been used in some cases.

Will my stitches/ staples need removing?

Some stitches dissolve by themselves. If they do not need to be taken out, you will have been told this.

If you have stitches or staples that need to be removed, you will need to arrange for removal as noted in the table below.

Please contact your GP surgery to arrange removal. They may advise you ring the single point of access (0300 300 7777) for an appointment, if your GP does not offer this service.

Number of stitches/staples	Inserted on	When to remove
		Remove in days

Will I need a tetanus jab?

Tetanus is a serious but rare condition. It is caused by tetanus bacteria. It can enter your body through a wound or cut in your skin. We may give you a tetanus booster if your tetanus vaccinations are not up-to-date and if your wound is high risk (for example, a farming incident, animal bite, old burn, or very dirty).

Anti-tetanus cover up-to-date?	Anti-tetanus booster given if needed?	Patient unsure about anti-tetanus vaccination status - please check

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What advice do I need to follow to care for my wound?

- Raise (elevate) the area for the next 72 hours. This will help reduce swelling and improve healing. You may have been given a sling to help with this.
- Keep your wound clean and dry for at least 2 days. After this time you may have a shower and wash the wound very gently with water. Pat the wound dry afterwards with a clean towel or kitchen roll. It is important that you do not have a bath or swim until the stitches/ staples have been removed, as this can increase the risk of an infection.
- Avoid exercise or activities that could damage the wound until your stitches/ staples have been removed. This is to stop the stitches/ staples from breaking and the cut from opening up again.
- Itching is common during healing. Do not scratch the area as this increases the risk of infection. Moisturiser such as E45 may help after the stitches or staples have been removed.
- You should protect your scar from the sun with sunscreen or by wearing clothing or a hat that covers the scar for the next 12 months.

Dressing changes

- Dressings should be changed every 2 to 3 days, unless you have been advised differently when you were treated.
- You may have been advised it is fine to do this yourself, or to see the nurse at your GP surgery.
- It is advisable to take pain relief before a dressing change if it is uncomfortable.
- If the dressing gets wet from blood or any other liquid, it must be changed to reduce the risk of infection. A small amount of staining on your dressing is acceptable.

How to change the dressing

1. Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, especially your palms and between your fingers.
2. Dry hands with a clean towel/ kitchen roll.
3. Prepare your dressings by opening them and make sure that the dressing is kept in the packet, as this is clean.
4. Wash your hands again.
5. Carefully take off the dirty dressing. Do not touch the side that has been in contact with your wound.
6. If the dressing is stuck, soak with some water and wait for the dressing to loosen, a gentle 'pull' may be needed. It is not unusual to see a small amount of fresh blood. Do not panic - apply gentle pressure and this should stop.

7. Place the dirty dressing in a waste bag and wash your hands again.
8. Wash your wound using tap water. Make sure the wound and surrounding skin are cleaned (or you can do this in the shower after 2 days.)
9. Do not soak the wound. This might soften the wound, increase the risk of infection and re-open the wound. Make sure the water is not too hot and the force of the shower is not too fast.
10. Use a separate clean towel or kitchen roll to pat the area dry. Make sure the wound and surrounding skin are fully dry before applying the new dressing.
11. Put the new dressing on your wound. Take care not to touch the inside of the new dressing so that it stays clean. Make sure the edges of the dressing are stuck down.

What do I need to look out for?

Healing wounds will be slightly swollen, red and warm and you may see a clear yellow discharge on your dressings. This is normal.

Signs of wound infection include:

- Increased pain
- Increased swelling
- Increased redness or heat around the wound
- Pus leaking from the dressing, or a bad smell
- A fever or feeling unwell

If you have any of these symptoms or are concerned about your wound contact your GP straight away.

Contact details

Injuries Unit, Emergency Department: 0116 258 5727

Switchboard 0300 303 1573.

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