

Post-Operative Wound Care for Patients and Caregivers

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After a surgery or procedure where the surgeon makes an incision (cut) on your body, it is important to follow rules to carefully care for the surgical wound that is left. Proper wound care will help prevent infection, reduce scarring and discomfort, and promote healing. Do not wear any tight clothing that might rub on your incisions. Avoid scratching your wound and moving the area surrounding your incision to reduce the risk of the wound opening.

It is usually recommended to not let your wound get wet the first 24 hours after your surgery. Your physician will tell you when it is ok to shower or bathe after your surgery. A dressing (also known as a bandage) protects your wound and keeps it clean and dry as it heals. Remove any dressings before you shower, unless you have a waterproof dressing or are instructed otherwise. Showers are better than baths, since soaking your wound can cause it to reopen or become infected. You can gently rinse the wound with water as you bathe if you have the go-ahead to, but do not scrub or rub the wound or apply any soap or bath products on the wound. Gently pat dry the area around the wound with a towel after, and let the wound air dry. Then apply a thick moisturizer like petroleum jelly.

Your physician will give you specific instructions on when and how to change your dressings. Before and after you change your dressing, make sure to always wash your hands well with soap and water. Clean a surface to work on and make sure you have all the necessary supplies.

To remove the old dressing, gently loosen the tape from your skin and pull off the old dressing. If the dressing sticks to the wound, try wetting it unless you have been specifically told to remove it dry.

After doing so, you can clean the skin around your incision with a soft cloth or gauze pad soaked in soapy water or in saline (a mixture of sterile water and salt). Gently dab and wipe the skin around the wound, instead of rubbing it. Avoid using antibacterial soaps, peroxide, iodine,

or alcohol to reduce damage to the skin. Don't use any lotions, creams, or herbal products at that area as well, unless you have checked with your doctor. Clean the wound itself as instructed by your doctor, which may include following the same instructions as above, or washing out the wound with a syringe of soapy water or saline. Check your incision for any signs of infection, like swelling or color changes to your skin. After this, wash your hands again.

If your doctor prescribed an ointment or medication for you to apply, apply a thin layer of it to the incision. Hold a new, clean dressing by the corner, making sure to avoid touching the inside of the dressing. Place it over your wound and tape down all 4 sides to your skin. Dispose of the trash and wash your hands again.

Call your doctor if you see any signs of infection at your wound, such as growing pain, redness, swelling, bleeding, and if the wound is larger, deeper, or looks dark or dried out. Let your doctor know if there is increased drainage from or around the wound that may be green, yellow, white, cream, opaque, or smells bad. Also call your doctor if your temperature is higher than 100.5°F for more than 4 hours.

References

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