



Wound care after surgery (secondary intent healing)

This leaflet is for patients who have had skin surgery and explains things that you can do to look after your wound to lower the chance of infection and encourage healing.

What is secondary intent healing?

Instead of closing the wound with stitches, the clinician has decided to leave the wound to heal by itself, from the bottom of the wound, upwards. This is called 'secondary intent healing'.

You will usually need regular dressing changes to the area for up to 6 weeks; however, this may vary, depending on the size, depth and location of your wound.

A secondary intent healed scar will be circular or oval shape instead of a classical line scar when it is all healed.

Please arrange an appointment with your GP practice nurse to change the dressings regularly (once or twice weekly) as advised by the Dermatology team at the time of your surgery. We sometimes also arrange for you to come back to our Wound Review Clinic but will advise you of this at the time if it is necessary.

Wound care advice

- We recommend that you rest for 48 hours after your skin surgery to reduce the risk of post-operative complications. Avoid strenuous exercise such as running, cycling or dog walking.
- Your wound may be a little painful for the first few days. Take paracetamol as required, 4 to 6 hourly up to maximum of 8 tablets within the 24hour period, following the dosage advice on the packet. Avoid aspirin or ibuprofen as these may prolong the bleeding.
- If your skin surgery was on the head or face, it would be helpful to keep your head upright and to avoid bending forward or down for 48 hours. You can also use an extra pillow at night to prop yourself up.
- If your skin surgery was on the lower leg, elevating your leg may be helpful. This will help with any throbbing and will reduce the risk of swelling and infection. Rest your leg on a footstool when you are seated.
- Do not remove any dressings yourself, as your GP practice nurse will look after this. If the dressings becomes loose, please apply more dressings or tape over the top.
- Slight post-operative bleeding may stain the dressing but requires no action. **However, if the bleeding is heavy, place some gauze on top of the original dressing and apply firm pressure for 10-15 minutes.** We advise you to set a timer to ensure the adequate time has passed.
- **Surgery, especially around the eye or on the forehead, can result in bruising.** This requires no treatment and will disappear over the course of a fortnight.

- Most surgical wounds heal without causing any problems. However, wound infections are one of the most common complications after surgery. This means that germs have started to grow in the wound, which can delay normal wound healing. Wound infections are usually treated with a course of antibiotics. **If, after a few days, the wound becomes more painful, there is redness spreading outwards from underneath the dressing, feeling feverish, inflamed or swollen, leaks liquid, pus or blood or smells unpleasant, then you should contact your GP or practice nurse as soon as possible.**
- The secondary intent scar can take up to 12-18 months to heal completely. Once, the dressings are finally removed, apply Vaseline daily to the surgical area to allow the scab to come off naturally. Once it has fallen off, you may massage the scar 2-3 times a day with Vaseline or any similar moisturiser to help reduce the scar and blend it into the surrounding skin.
- You will receive a letter with the result of any tests taken during surgery within 4-6 weeks. Your GP will be informed of the result at the same time. If you do not receive that letter, please contact us or ask your GP to chase it up for you.

Please feel free to discuss any questions or worries you may have with your doctor.

Contacting us

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To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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Next review due: February 2027