

Patient information factsheet

Skin surgery with stitches

This factsheet aims to answer any questions you may have after your skin surgery. If you require any further information or have any concerns please contact us on the number at the end of this factsheet.

- The local anaesthetic will usually wear off in about one to three hours. During this time do not exert yourself and avoid doing any strenuous activity as this may increase the risk of bleeding.
- It is important to rest and eat a good balanced diet which will aid your general healing and wellbeing.
- If you are in pain we recommend that you take paracetamol, two tablets of 500mgs, which can be repeated after four to six hours (maximum of eight tablets in any 24 hour period).
- Keep your dressing in place and dry for two days. After two days you may shower as normal. Remove the wet dressing and pat the area dry.
- Apply a thin smear of petroleum jelly directly over the stitches morning and evening. Only reapply a plaster if you would like to.
- Repeat this process daily until the stitches are removed.

You may be asked to wear compression bandages after having surgery to your lower legs. The bandages help the wound to heal. The bandages need to be changed weekly, either with your own practice nurse or at the dermatology department wound clinic. The bandages need to be kept clean and dry between the dressing changes. It is important to continue with gentle exercise, to sit with your legs elevated at rest and not to stand for long periods of time. The bandages may be worn for several weeks while the wound is healing. If you experience any pins and needles, discolouration to the toes or pain please seek urgent advice from your practice nurse.

You may be asked to wear a sling after having surgery to your hand or lower arm. The sling will help keep your arm elevated, this will help to prevent bleeding, swelling and make your arm feel more comfortable. This may be worn for 24 to 48 hours or sometimes longer if needed. You will be given advice by the dermatology doctor or nurse.

Frequently asked questions

'Can I keep the original dressing on for more than 48 hours?'

Yes, as long as the dressing remains clean and dry.

Bleeding

If you start to bleed or notice blood on the dressing, do not panic. Slight oozing or spotting of blood on the dressing is normal. However, if the bleeding persists apply firm, continual pressure to the area for fifteen minutes (usually this will stop most bleeding). An icepack wrapped in a tea towel (frozen peas are ideal), pressed firmly against the wound can also be helpful.

Frequently asked questions

'What should I do if I cannot stop the bleeding'?

Between the hours of 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday (Thursdays, 8am to 2pm) please call the dermatology department on **023 8054 0204**.

Outside of these hours please contact the Southampton General Hospital Switchboard on **023 8077 7222** and ask for the on-call dermatologist who will be available until 8pm. After 8pm please go to the emergency department at Southampton General Hospital for assistance.

'What should I do if I take medication such as aspirin, warfarin or clopidogrel, which are blood thinners'?

You are slightly at a higher risk of bleeding, but do not stop taking your medication unless advised to do so.

General information

Swelling and bruising

Some swelling and bruising may happen. This should improve over the week, but may sometimes last longer.

Frequently asked questions:

'My swelling is not improving.'

Please contact your GP or the dermatology department for advice if you are concerned.

Infection

We take every precaution to prevent a wound infection before, during and after your operation. Despite this, some wounds will still become infected. Symptoms of a wound infection include increase in redness, increase in pain, increase in swelling, discharge and smell. You may also experience fever or feel generally unwell.

Frequently asked questions:

'Who do I contact if I think I have an infection'?

Contact the dermatology department (see details on the next page) or your GP if you have one or more of the above symptoms. You may be prescribed an antibiotic if the wound is infected.

Smoking

Smoking affects your healing. You are advised to stop or at least reduce your daily amount of cigarettes for the duration of your healing.

Alcohol

Alcohol can increase the risk of bleeding from the wound. You are advised to avoid alcohol for 24 hours after your surgery.

Scarring

Every effort will be made to minimise the scar. However, scars can be unpredictable. On the chest, shoulders, back, arms and legs, scars can spread, may become thickened and be more noticeable. You should avoid physical activities that put a strain on the stitches for the first two to three weeks. Straining the stitches may lead to the wound opening and this could affect the healing of the wound and how it looks once it has healed.

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After your stitches have been removed, massage the scar using petroleum jelly for five minutes twice a day, for about a month. This will help improve the way the scar looks. Some people will develop a slight reaction to stitches under the skin which will make the scar feel lumpy. This will settle in time.

Numbness

Numbness in the area of the scar can occur. Usually this will improve over time but can last up to two years, or in rare cases, longer.

Removal of stitches

Your healthcare professional will advise which of the following apply:

Please make an appointment with your practice nurse in days.

Day Date

Your stitches will need to be removed in the department in days.

Day Date

Please make your appointment with your practice nurse as soon as possible as they can become booked up.

(Delete as necessary)

Wound opening before or after stitch removal

Please contact the dermatology department for advice

Information for practice nurse:

- If you suspect an infection, please swab the area before prescribing an antibiotic.
- Please contact the department if there are any concerns on **023 8054 0204**

Type of stitches used:

Number of stitches:

Any additional information for practice/district nurse:

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Seeking and acting on patient feedback is key to improving the quality of our services. The Friends and Family Test gives you the opportunity to give your view on the care or treatment you've received. You can complete the survey online by visiting <http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/PatientsAndVisitors/Patientexperienceandsatisfaction/Friends-and-Family-Test.aspx> and entering the password **rhmo** when prompted.

Southampton dermatology department

Tel: **023 8054 0204**, opening hours: 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday (Thursday 8am to 2pm only).

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.