

Wound healing by secondary intention after skin surgery

Information for patients

This information sheet has been written to help you to care for your wound after surgery.

Instead of closing the wound by stitching, the operator would prefer the wound to heal itself. This is called healing by secondary intention. Sometimes stitches, often absorbable ones, are used to reduce the size of the wound and thus the healing time. This method of healing can be straightforward and can sometimes be used to avoid a skin flap or graft, and stitch removal, but it will require regular dressings applied to the wound for approximately eight to ten weeks, depending on its size and depth.

A dry dressing is applied in theatre after your operation and left in place for 3-7 days. After this initial period the dry dressing is replaced by a thin, non-breathable (occlusive) dressing which keeps the wound bed moist. This moisture encourages new skin to grow from the base of the wound. The longer the wound is kept moist, the more new skin grows. Once the wound is filled with new skin and level with the surrounding skin surface the dressings are stopped and the skin is allowed to dry out. This halts the overgrowth of new skin and formation of the top layer of skin (epidermis). Initially the surface will be very pink or red but over weeks to months this will return to normal.

The dressings can be done by your GP practice nurse, family member or yourself. If you, or a family member, feel confident about attending to your own wound care you will be able to change some of the dressings at home rather than go to the GP surgery.

You or your family member will be shown by the nurse in the Dermatology Dressings Clinic how to look after your wound a few days after your surgery.

If you are still uncertain, please ask to be shown again.

If you do decide to look after your own wound, please follow the guidelines below:

1. The wound should be cleaned two to three times a week with plain, cooled, boiled water using gauze or a similar material **or** remove the soiled dressing before showering and allow the water to run over the wound
2. Gently pat the area dry
3. Apply a thin layer of soft paraffin ointment and a fresh occlusive dressing.

If you have any questions about your dressing or wound, please contact the dermatology department (contact details below).

Time of day	Person to contact	Telephone number
9am-5pm Monday to Friday	The nurse in charge of the dermatology outpatient treatment unit	0131 536 2068
Out with these hours	NHS 24	111