

Spinal wound care

Patient information factsheet

What is a surgical wound?

- During a spinal operation, the Surgeon makes a cut in the skin and muscles to reach the spine.
- After the operation, the muscles are stitched back together.
- The stitches dissolve (are absorbed) in the body over time.
- The skin is then closed in the best way for the patient.
- This helps the skin and muscles heal properly.
- It also helps lower the risk of problems or complications.

Different types of skin closure

- There are different ways to close the skin after surgery.
- The method used depends on the wound, where it is, and the patient's needs.
- These might include:
 - **Sutures (Stitches):** Threads are used to sew the edges of the skin together. They can be either dissolvable (absorbed by the body over time) or non-dissolvable (which need to be removed later).
 - **Adhesive strips (e.g. Steri-Strips):** Thin strips of medical tape that hold the skin edges together, usually used for small or wounds that are not deep.
 - **Surgical clips,** which will need to be covered and removed two weeks after surgery.

Types of wound dressings

Mepore dressing

- This is a soft, waterproof dressing that sticks to the skin. It is gentle and comfortable.
- It absorbs small to medium amounts of fluid.
- It helps protect the wound from dirt and germs.
- It is often used on surgical wounds or minor cuts because it's breathable.
- It helps keep the wound moist, which promotes faster healing.

Pressure dressing

- This is a dressing that is pressed firmly onto the wound.
- It helps stop bleeding by putting pressure on the blood vessels.
- It also helps reduce swelling.
- Usually, it is taken off in the ward before you go home.

Keeping a healthy wound

- Try not to touch the wound or dressing. This helps prevent infection.
- Always wash your hands well before and after touching the wound.
- If somebody else needs to touch your dressing, make sure they wash their hands.
- Keep the wound dry and do not get it wet.
- Do not soak the wound or dressing in water.
- Change the dressing only if it becomes wet, dirty, or starts to ooze.
- It is normal for the wound to feel itchy as it heals.
- Do not scratch the wound or the skin around the dressing

Frequently asked questions

When can I shower?

- After 48 hours (2 days), it is usually safe to shower unless your surgeon says not to.
- Keep the wound covered with a waterproof dressing while showering.
- Do not let water spray directly onto the wound.

When can I bathe?

- No bathing for two weeks.
- Patients who have had high neck surgery can have a bath. They must not soak their wounds.
- Once the stitches have been removed or absorbed, it should be fine to bathe.
- Remember, there may be other reasons spinal patients should not have baths.
- Please talk about this with your surgical/nursing team.

When can I wash my hair?

- It is possible to wash your hair without putting the wound in water.
- Take special care if the wound is on the neck.
- Ask someone to help you wash your hair safely.
- Avoid getting water or soap into the wound area.

What if my dressing gets wet or accidentally comes off?

- The dressing needs to be replaced as soon as possible.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water before applying a new dressing (or make sure the person doing it for you also washes their hands well).
- Carefully put the dressing back on. Do not touch the side that will touch your wound.

When can I go swimming?

- After the stitches are removed and the wound is healed, swimming is usually fine.
- Only avoid swimming if there are other restrictions, like trouble moving or bending.

When can I drive?

- Driving means being able to stop safely in an emergency, as the DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency) requires.
- Talk to your clinician and your insurance company before driving.

When can I return to work?

- Office work: usually around 4 to 6 weeks.
- Manual (physical) work: usually around 8 to 12 weeks.
- Please discuss your return to work with your clinician.

Early signs of possible wound infection

- Redness spreading around the wound
- Increased swelling or warmth near the wound
- Pain that gets worse instead of better
- Pus or cloudy discharge coming from the wound
- Unpleasant smell from the wound area
- Fever or feeling unwell.

If you develop any of these symptoms, please call 07833 200 495 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) as soon as possible for assistance. For further advice, and assistance outside of these hours, contact NHS Direct on 111.

Contact our service

If you have any queries, please contact the Orthopaedics Department.

Email: whh-tr.orthopaedics@nhs.net

Tel: 07833 200 495, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. You can leave a message, and we will call you back.

Contact our Trust

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on **020 7288 5551** or whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet, please email whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net. We will try our best to meet your needs.

020 7272 3070 | Whittington Health NHS Trust, Magdala Avenue, London, N19 5NF
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