



**This is a guide only and does not  
replace clinical judgment**

**References:**

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# Surgical Wounds

Information for **health professionals**



# Surgical Wounds

## Assessment

- Undertake a comprehensive, structured, assessment to identify factors that may affect surgical wound healing
- Risk factors for complications include:
  - advanced age
  - smoking
  - overweight and/or malnutrition
  - poor glycaemic control
  - recent radiotherapy
  - long term use of steroids
  - wound type (contaminated)
  - prolonged duration of surgery
- Reassess and document progress in healing regularly



**A moist wound environment enables migration of tissue repairing cells. Extreme wetness or dryness may delay healing.**

## Management

- Develop a management plan including client, family and carers
- Use the appropriate aseptic technique for changing or removing dressings
- Cleanse surgical wounds with sterile saline up to 48 hours after surgery; then cleanse with a neutral, non-toxic solution (e.g. potable tap water or normal saline) after a risk assessment to guide choice of cleanser
- Remove devitalised or infected tissue through mechanical, sharp, autolytic or biological debridement
  - \*Debridement should only be undertaken by health professionals with expertise in the area*
- Do not use a topical antiseptic agent to reduce risk of infection for surgical wounds healing by primary intention
- There is no evidence that any specific type of dressing, or type of topical antiseptic agent, improves healing or infection outcomes
- Negative pressure wound therapy may reduce risk of infection in surgical wounds
- Choose a dressing which promotes moisture balance to promote healing



## Prevention

- Develop a plan to reduce risk factors for poor surgical wound healing
- Encourage cessation of smoking for four weeks prior to surgery and in the post-operative phase
- Surgical prophylactic antibiotics may be given within 120 minutes before incision if appropriate
- Optimise glucose control in the perioperative phase
- Ensure optimal levels of nutrition for healing
- Educate clients, family and carers on all aspects of surgical wound management