



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

References

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Surgical Wounds

Information for people, family and carers



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Surgical Wounds

Caring for a surgical wound

After surgery, a simple incision may take a week or two to close over and stop oozing. If you've had extensive surgery, complications, or the incision has opened up, the healing process may take a month or longer.

After the wound has closed on the skin, the tissue underneath will still be healing for some months. It may take a year or so before this process is complete and the scar tissue softens and pales.

Research has found keeping the wound covered with a dressing reduces pain and lowers the risk of infection.

Check with your health professional for instructions on caring for your wound and changing dressings



Contact your health professional for advice if:

- You have increasing amounts of discharge from the wound (e.g. over half of the dressing is soaked through), or a yellow or green discharge
- there is an increasing amount of discharge or bleeding from the incision
- there is an area of hardness, or swelling, around the wound
- the incision is separating or increasing in size
- the wound is not healing within four weeks
- there is a change or increase in pain
- You have a fever and/or the area around the wound is red, hot to touch, swollen and painful. Some redness and swelling is normal initially, however, this should resolve within a week

Healing the incision

✓ Do

- Wash and dry your hands before checking your wound or changing the dressing
- Check your wound daily for signs of infection or complications (see 'contact your health professional')
- Eat a balanced, healthy diet
- Seek advice on pain management if needed – pain can restrict blood flow to the wound
- Consult your health professional about how often to change the dressings. Most modern dressings require changing once/day or less, to promote rapid healing.

✗ Don't

- Do not expose the wound to air or the sun to 'dry out'
- Do not smoke – this reduces the supply of oxygen to heal the wound
- Do not apply any creams or ointments on the wound unless asked to by your health professional
- Do not wet any non-waterproof dressings in the shower