

Emergency Department Wound Care - Sutures

General Information

Your wound was closed with sutures (stitches) to help speed healing, reduce the chance of infection, and reduce the amount of scarring. The pain from your wound decreases after 24 to 48 hours. If you have not had a tetanus booster in the past 5 to 10 years, you may need a tetanus shot.

Instructions

- Keep the wound clean and dry for the next 2 to 3 days.
- If your wound is on your arms or legs, elevate the affected limb on a pillow as much as possible during the first 24 hours to reduce the pain and swelling.
- After 24 hours you may change the bandage. If the bandage is stuck to the wound, use warm water to soak it off.
- Gently clean around the wound with warm water and soap and dress it with an antibiotic ointment as recommended.
- Do not pull on the ends of the sutures even if they are itchy.
- For a mouth or lip wound, rinse your mouth after meals with warm salted water (a teaspoon of salt in a glass of water). Do not swallow the water.
- If you have a wound on your head, you may wash your hair gently after you get home.
- If the wound begins to bleed, apply gentle direct pressure for 10 to 15 minutes to stop the bleeding.

Non-absorbable sutures:

You have had a wound repaired with non-absorbable sutures.

- Make an appointment with your family doctor to have your sutures removed in _____ days.

Absorbable sutures:

You have had a wound repaired with absorbable sutures. These stitches may be used deep in a wound to help hold it together. It may also be used through the skin or in the mouth. If these stitches are below the skin, the body will absorb them completely in 3 to 4 weeks. If they have been used on your skin, they may absorb rapidly and may not need to be removed by your doctor. As your wound begins to heal over the next 7 to 10 days, the sutures are no longer needed, and they typically begin to fall off at about this time.

- At 7 to 10 days if your stitches are loose, you can remove them simply by wiping with a clean gauze pad or cotton ball. Do not pull your stitches out - they should wipe away easily.
- Have your family doctor take them out if they are still in place after 10 days.

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Return to Emergency if any of the following develop:

- You have numbness or severe swelling below the wound and cannot move the joint below the wound.
- If the bleeding continues despite constant pressure.
- Red streaks coming from the injured site.
- Increased temperature or fever.
- Pus draining from the wound.

For more information or questions contact HealthLinkBC at 811.

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