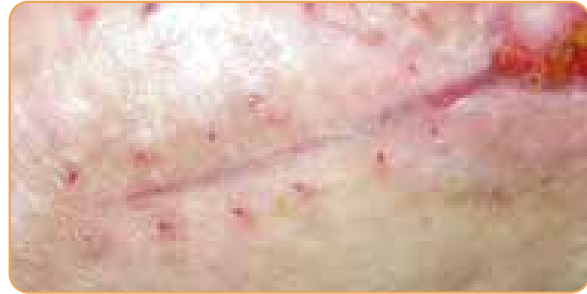


What are the signs to watch out for?

Many wounds heal without any problems. The most common complication after surgery is wound infection, and this will delay normal healing. Contact your GP or nurse if:



Swelling is a sign of infection

- There is any redness, pain or swelling in the area surrounding the wound (this is often the first sign of infection)
- Your wound looks larger or deeper
- There is no bleeding, but the discharge has changed in colour (eg from clear/pink to red-brown/yellow/green), volume (ie the wound leaks more) and/or consistency (ie from thin and watery to thick)
- Your wound starts to smell
- The wound has not healed within 4 weeks
- You're running a fever
- You're experiencing continual or increased pain

References

International Wound Infection Institute. *Wound infection in clinical practice*. Wounds International, 2016.
The Canadian Association of Wound Care. *Best Practice Recommendations for the Prevention and Management of Surgical Wound Complications*, 2017.
World Health Organization. *Global Guidelines for the Prevention of Surgical Site Infection*, 2016.

Promoting healing by taking care of yourself

Healing depends on your general health and the type of surgery you have had – large or deep surgical incisions can take 6–8 weeks to heal while certain health problems and some medications can increase healing times. You will need to take care of yourself and pay attention to your body, as you may feel tired during your recovery. Your diet is important, so after surgery you should make sure you:

- Drink lots of fluid to stay hydrated
- Eat more calories than normal to provide the extra energy your body needs to repair itself
- Eat more protein (eg eggs, chicken, oats and almonds) to help build and repair tissue
- Avoid foods high in sugar, fat and/or sodium (eg sweets, sugary drinks, beef, butter, bacon, sausages, fast food and salt)
- Eat foods containing vitamin C and A (eg yellow and orange fruit and vegetables and dark green leafy vegetables) and zinc (eg meat, eggs, dairy, nuts and seeds) to help build new tissue and boost your immune system.

What should I do next?

Even if you don't have the exact symptoms described in this leaflet, if you have any concerns about the condition of your wound you should have it professionally assessed. In the first instance, contact your doctor or GP surgery.

If you have any concerns please contact

Hospital
Outpatients
Clinical nurse specialist
GP Surgery

Care of Your Wound Following General Surgery

To find out whether you have a Leg Club near you, or for any further information about Leg Clubs or the Leg Club model, contact
lynn.bullock@legclubfoundation.com
www.legclub.org



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What should I expect following surgery?

Recovery from surgery will depend on the type of procedure you have undergone. Your consultant or clinical nurse specialist will tell you what tasks you will be able to undertake while your wound is healing. They should also provide you with instructions on caring for your wound.

Your consultant may encourage you to start moving about immediately after surgery, building up to normal activity levels as soon as possible – ideally within the first week or two. It may take significantly longer to return to heavy manual work, certain sports and hobbies, eg gardening. You will be unable to drive immediately after surgery, so it is important to ask when it's safe to drive.

On discharge you will receive a follow-up appointment with your consultant/specialist team at an outpatient clinic or with your GP at your general practice surgery. It is important you attend, as your progress will be reviewed. If you have had clips or sutures (stitches), they will be removed. Your surgical incision (wound) will be examined to assess how well it is healing.



A healthy surgical wound

What to look for: the wound, dressings and surrounding skin

The time it takes for a wound to heal depends on the type and extent of your surgery. Some incisions will close over and stop oozing in a week, while others may take a month or longer to close. Even when a wound appears to have healed on the surface, the tissue underneath will continue healing for up to a year.



A perfect dressing

Slight leakage



Indicating need to change dressing

Urgent replacement dressing required

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF MOUNIYCKE

Most wounds will be covered with a dressing. The most suitable type of dressing for your wound will be selected based on a number of factors, including the type and size of your wound, your age and skin type. There are various types of dressings available. They can be:

- Adhesive (sticky) or non-adhesive
- Different sizes
- Different shapes to cover different areas of the body
- Designed to absorb different levels of fluid from wounds
- Some are colour marked so you can see when your dressing should be changed



Redness indicates a problem

Your dressing has been developed to protect and help your wound to heal rather than just to cover it.

Repeated dressing changes and the application and removal of sticky (adhesive) tapes can make the skin very red and sore, causing pain and discomfort. This can happen even when a dressing is removed carefully if your skin is sensitive, the wound is painful or the dressing has dried (got stuck) to the wound.

Tell the person who is treating you if you are sensitive to adhesives, eg you have reacted to plasters or dressings in the past.

Reasons for using a wound dressing:

- Reduce pain
- Reduce the risk of infection
- Provide ideal conditions for healing
- Absorb any leakage from the wound area
- Prevent stitches catching on clothing

If you find dressing changes painful, you may be advised to take a mild painkiller, eg paracetamol, a short while before you have your dressings changed.

If your dressing sticks to the wound, you may need a different type of dressing.

Not all surgical wounds require dressings. Your consultant may apply adhesive strips, which are sterile pieces of medical tape used to close wounds and help the edges grow back together. These strips keep the wound clean and protected while it heals. They usually fall off after 7–10 days.

Your wound will change throughout the healing process. When the nurse is changing your dressing, it will give you a chance to take a closer look at your wound. Your wound is healthy if there is no redness, inflammation, pain or bleeding and the discharge – if any – is clear or a pale colour, watery and does not smell. As healing takes place, your wound will get smaller and the discharge may be less.

Red Flags

Call your doctor, local emergency service or go to the A&E department immediately if:

- You have a fever, chills or light-headedness and a temperature above 37.8°C (100°F) for more than 4 hours
- You have difficulty breathing
- You feel confused
- You have pain that is not getting better
- Your wound is bleeding and does **NOT** stop