

# Hand Wound Care & Dressings

## Introduction

This leaflet has been written to give you information and advice on caring for your surgical wound(s) once you get home. There are different types of surgical wounds, so it is important to follow the advice you receive when you are discharged from hospital. Not all surgical wounds need dressings. The purpose of a dressing is to:

- absorb any leakage from the wound
- provide ideal conditions for healing
- protect the area until the wound is healed
- prevent stitches catching on clothing.

## Stitches (also called sutures)

Most types of stitches have to be removed by a healthcare professional, but some stitches don't need to be removed as they dissolve. Stitches are usually removed 14 days after treatment, depending on the type of operation you have had. You should be told after the operation whether your stitches are dissolving or not. If you have dissolving stitches, you should expect some mild redness of the skin close to the stitches as they dissolve. Stitches that dissolve can take 7-28 days to loosen and then fall away, dependent on environment and the type of material used. A dissolving stitch can sometimes be hidden inside a wound. In such instances there may be nothing to see, while at other times there may be a knot visible on either end of the wound. These knots can be allowed to fall away naturally, or trimmed after 14 days.

## Wound

Keep your dressing dry and clean at all times. If the dressing gets wet or if you are concerned about your wound contact our specialist hand nurse on 02476 965072. Once your stitches are removed and your wound is fully healed you should start massaging the scar with a water based moisturiser for example E45, Aqueous cream. This is an important part of your treatment, as it will help reduce internal scar volume (which can be a source of persistent discomfort and restriction), as well as help desensitise the area.

## Swelling

Swelling can be a source of pain and stiffness. To minimise this keep your hand raised as much as possible. Your doctor may refer to this as elevation. Ice-packs can also be used to reduce swelling, but please wrap them in a water-proof cover to avoid soaking your dressings, and avoid direct contact your skin.

## When you change the dressing

- If you or someone else needs to change the dressing at any time, please ensure hands are cleaned thoroughly. Make sure the surface you're using is also clean, wiping it down with soap and water before setting down any of the wound care supplies.
- Carefully take the dirty dressing off (without touching the used side) by lifting the edges of the dressing toward the centre of the wound, then gently lift it from the wound.
- Do not touch the healing wound with your fingers.
- Take care not to touch the inside of the new dressing, so that it remains clean.
- Do not apply antiseptic cream under the dressing
- If the dressing is stuck to the wound, you can moisten it with tap water which can help to loosen it. Put the old dressing (and gloves if you are using them) in a plastic bag for proper disposal.
- If you have been told it is safe to wash your hand, hold the hand under running water at a comfortable temperature. Avoid soaking in a bath or bowl. Pat the wound dry gently with a clean towel afterwards.
- If the wound is healing (and not bleeding or leaking fluid) it can be left without a dressing, but you may prefer to have a dressing to cover the wound for protection, especially if your clothing can rub against it. This is frequently recommended by your surgeon for the first 10-14 days.
- If you have been given a splint to wear it is very important that you carry on wearing it as you were shown. It will help you in the future with your hand movements.

## Complications

Please contact the Hand Team if you have any of the following problems:

- Pain that is not relieved by taking your pain killers or elevation.
- Bleeding that will not stop after applying gentle pressure and elevating the hand to chest height or above.
- A very swollen hand that is getting worse rather than better (despite elevation).
- Any new pins and needles, or new numbness in your hand that persists more than 24 hours, despite elevating the hand to chest height or above.
- Any redness that feels hot to the touch, and spreads beyond the dressing.
- You feel generally unwell.
- A smelly discharge coming through the dressing .

In the event of you experiencing any problems please do not hesitate to contact the Hand Team on 02476 965072. This phone is not staffed 24 hours a day, but leave a message and someone will get back to you within 3 days.



## PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

---

### Further information

The day surgery unit can be contacted on 02476 966861 / 02476 966868 (University Hospital), or on 01788 663264 (Hospital of St. Cross). For further information please contact Hand Therapy:

- at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire on 02476 966016
- at Hospital of St. Cross, Rugby on 01788 663257
- our specialist hand surgery nurse / hand-coordinator on 02476 965072

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 02476 966861 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

#### Document History

Author	Lynne Nicholls
Department	Orthopaedics
Contact Tel No	26861
Published	March 2020
Reviewed	
Review	March 2022
Version	1
Reference No	