Wound care

This fact sheet is for people who have presented to the emergency department requiring wound care.

This fact sheet provides general information. If you have specific concerns, speak to your healthcare professional for further information and advice.

What is a wound?

Wounds are injuries to the skin and can be classified as incisions (cuts), lacerations (ragged cuts) or abrasions (grazes or scratches).

Treatment

In the emergency department, your wound will have been cleaned and will most often have a covering or bandage (dressing).

For some wounds, stitches (sutures), thin strips of adhesive tape (steri-strips), medical glue and medical staples are used, either alone or in combination, to close the wound.

If local anaesthetic has been used, it will wear off in 30-60 minutes and you may need to take painkillers.

A tetanus injection may be given in the hospital if you have not previously had one within the recommended timeframe.

Stitches (Sutures)

The length of time the stitches will need to stay in place will depend on where the wound is on your body. You will be informed when your stitches need to be removed.

You will need to book an appointment with the practice nurse or your general practitioner (GP) to have these removed. DO NOT attempt to remove the stitches by yourself.

Suture removal is not usually a painful procedure.

Steri-strips

Steri-strips are a sticky tape-like dressing that hold the edges of a wound together. These can simply be removed by yourself or by your GP or practice nurse after 5-7 days.

To remove steri-strips, moisten the wound and with warm water and gently remove.

Medical glue

Medical glue is specially formulated to treat wounds and does not have to be removed.

The glue will form part of the scab and fall off in about 10 days when the wound is healed.

Medical staples

The length of time the staples will need to stay in place will depend on where the wound is on the body.

Before you leave the emergency department, you will be informed when your staples need to be removed. DO NOT attempt to remove the staples by yourself.

You will need to book an appointment with the practice nurse, or your GP at your local surgery to have the staples removed.

Dressings

A dressing may be used to protect the wound, depending on the site and type of wound you have. Your doctor or nurse will advise you when the dressing should be changed or removed.

Home care

- If you have your wound closed with stitches, medical glue, steri-strips or staples, it is important to keep the wound and dressing clean and dry.
- Avoid bathing or showering the affected area for five days, to allow the wound to start to heal.
- Getting steri-strips or medical glue wet may cause your wound to re-open.
- If at any time the wound comes apart or you are worried by the wound, please contact your GP.

- DO NOT pick the wound
- Keep wound rested and elevated, if advised to do so.
- Should the dressing become dirty or wet, it will need to be replaced by the practice nurse or GP at your local surgery.
- Do not cover the dressing or wound with anything waterproof as this can make the wound soggy and can increase the chance of infection.
- If your wound is closed with staples, you can wash the staples and surrounding area, but please take special care to thoroughly dry the area after.

- Take paracetamol for pain relief if necessary.
- For some wounds, particularly those on the face, ointment may be prescribed as part of your wound management plan.

What to expect

Once the wound closure method has been removed, gently massage the area with moisturising cream (ask your pharmacist for a suitable product) to encourage good wound healing.

Always protect the scar with sunblock.

Signs of infection

Please contact your GP should any of the following symptoms develop:

- Redness
- Any wound discharge or pus
- Swelling
- Heat around the wound
- An increase in pain