Home Wound and Incision Care

Sutures or staples
Sutures (stitches) are like threads used to close a wound or incision. The sutures you can see on top of the skin do not dissolve. Any sutures put under the skin will dissolve. Your doctor will tell you when to have your sutures or staples removed. How long they stay in will depend on the location of your wound or incision.

Steri-strips
You may have steri-strips (tape) holding your wound together instead of sutures. Do not remove steri-strips. They will slowly fall off in 5 to 7 days or your doctor will remove them. If your steri-strips curl up, you may trim them, but do not remove them.

Dressing
Keep your incision/wound clean and dry. This will help with healing and prevent infection. Follow the instructions checked below:

- Your wound does not need a bandage and will heal better left open to the air.
- Do not remove dressing. It will be changed at your next doctor appointment. If the dressing becomes dirty, wet or loose before your next appointment, contact your doctor.
- You may remove or change the dressing as instructed by your doctor.
- Do not remove the steri-strips (tapes) that have been placed across the wound. They will loosen on their own in 5 to 7 days or your doctor will remove them.
- You may shower.
- If instructed to keep your incision dry at all times, you may shower, but place a waterproof bandage over the area first.
- Clean your incision as directed by your doctor.

Bleeding from your incision
A small amount of discharge (pink or red) is normal. If it is bright red and it soaks the dressing, a small blood vessel near your incision may have broken. Apply a clean cloth or dressing over the incision and apply pressure. If bleeding continues, contact your doctor or the Emergency Department.

Infection
Watch for signs of infection. Call your doctor (don’t wait for your next appointment) if you notice any of these signs:
- Increasing pain or tenderness
- Increasing swelling
- Increasing redness
- Red streaks leading away from the wound
- Pus draining from the wound
- Wound area feels hot to the touch
- Fever over 101º F

Pain
You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) for pain as recommended by your doctor. Follow the instructions on the bottle. If your doctor has prescribed pain medicine, take it as ordered. Elevating the wound above the heart may help to prevent pain or throbbing. Also, as the wound heals, it may begin to itch.

Tetanus
You will be given a tetanus booster if you have not had one within the past 10 years. If tetanus is given, you can expect some discomfort and possibly redness or swelling at the injection site.

Follow-up care
Make an appointment with your doctor as directed.