

Incision Care, Adult

An incision is a cut that a doctor makes in your skin for surgery. Most times, these cuts are closed after surgery. Your cut from surgery may be closed with:

- Stitches (sutures).
- Staples.
- Skin glue.
- Skin tape (adhesive) strips.

You may need to go back to your doctor to have stitches or staples taken out. This may happen many days or many weeks after your surgery. You need to take good care of your cut so it does not get infected. Follow instructions from your doctor about how to care for your cut.

Supplies needed:

- Soap and water.
- A clean hand towel.
- Wound cleanser.
- A clean bandage (dressing), if needed.
- Cream or ointment, if told by your doctor.
- Clean gauze.

How to care for your cut from surgery

Cleaning your cut

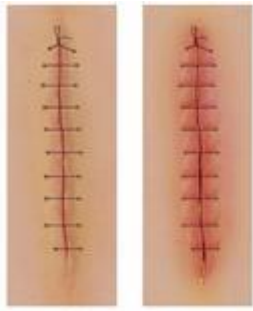
Ask your doctor how to clean your cut. You may need to:

- Wear medical gloves.
- Use mild soap and water, or a wound cleanser.
- Use a clean gauze to pat your cut dry after you clean it.

Changing your bandage

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after you change your bandage. If you cannot use soap and water, use hand sanitizer.
- **Do not** use disinfectants or antiseptics, such as rubbing alcohol, to clean your wound unless told by your doctor.
- Change your bandage as told by your doctor.
- Leave stitches or skin glue in place for at least 2 weeks.
- Leave tape strips alone unless you are told to take them off. You may trim the edges of the tape strips if they curl up.
- Put a cream or ointment on your cut. Do this only as told.
- Cover your cut with a clean bandage.
- Ask your doctor when you can leave your cut uncovered.

Checking for infection



Normal cut Infected cut

Check your cut area every day for signs of infection. Check for:

- More redness, swelling, or pain.
- More fluid or blood.
- New warmth.
- Hardness or a new rash around the incision.
- Pus or a bad smell.

Follow these instructions at home

Medicines

- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your doctor.
- If you were prescribed an antibiotic medicine, cream, or ointment, use it as told by your doctor. **Do not** stop using the antibiotic even if you start to feel better.

Eating and drinking

- Eat foods that have a lot of certain nutrients, such as protein, vitamin A, and vitamin C. These foods help your cut heal.
 - Foods rich in protein include meat, fish, eggs, dairy, beans, nuts, and protein drinks.
 - Foods rich in vitamin A include carrots and dark green, leafy vegetables.
 - Foods rich in vitamin C include citrus fruits, tomatoes, broccoli, and peppers.
- Drink enough fluid to keep your pee (urine) pale yellow.

General instructions



- **Do not** take baths, swim, or use a hot tub. Ask your doctor about taking showers or sponge baths.
- Limit movement around your cut. This helps with healing.
 - Try not to strain, lift, or exercise for the first 2 weeks, or for as long as told by your doctor.
 - Return to your normal activities as told by your doctor. Ask your doctor what activities are safe for you.
- **Do not** scratch, scrub, or pick at your cut. Keep it covered as told by your doctor.

- Protect your cut from the sun when you are outside for the first 6 months, or for as long as told by your doctor. Cover up the scar area or put on sunscreen that has an SPF of at least 30.
- **Do not** use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco, such as cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and chewing tobacco. These can delay cut healing. If you need help quitting, ask your doctor.
- Keep all follow-up visits.

Contact a doctor if:

- You have any of these signs of infection around your cut:
 - More redness, swelling, or pain.
 - More fluid or blood.
 - New warmth or hardness.
 - Pus or a bad smell.
 - A new rash.
- You have a fever.
- You feel like you may vomit (nauseous).
- You vomit.
- You are dizzy.
- Your stitches, staples, skin glue, or tape strips come undone.
- Your cut gets bigger.
- You have a fever.

Get help right away if:

- Your cut bleeds through your bandage, and bleeding does not stop with gentle pressure.
- Your cut opens up and comes apart.

These symptoms may be an emergency. Do not wait to see if the symptoms will go away. Get medical help right away. Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.). Do not drive yourself to the hospital.

Summary

- Follow instructions from your doctor about how to care for your cut.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after you change your bandage. If you cannot use soap and water, use hand sanitizer.
- Check your cut area every day for signs of infection.
- Keep all follow-up visits.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.