



Education

Wound Closure and Wound Care

What is wound closure?

Wounds heal more quickly when the wound is cleaned and the wound edges are held together (closed). Small wounds can be held together with tape strips called Steri-Strips or tissue adhesive spray. If a cut or surgical incision is deep, very long, jagged, or under a lot of tension (such as a cut over a joint), stitches (also called sutures) or staples may be needed to close the wound. The care of a stapled wound is similar to the care of a sutured wound.

How do I take care of my wound and sutures?

If you get an accidental cut, put pressure on the wound right away to stop the bleeding. Then gently but thoroughly wash it with soap and water. Try to remove all dirt and debris. Cover the wound and apply pressure as needed to control bleeding while traveling to your health care provider's office, urgent care clinic, or emergency room.

After a wound is closed it must be kept clean. Do not let it get wet for the first 24 hours. Then you can clean it with hydrogen peroxide or gently wash it with soap and water twice a day. Make sure the wound and sutures are kept dry between washings. If you wish, you may put a small amount of antibiotic ointment on the wound if it has been closed with stitches or staples. Do not use ointment if your wound is closed with adhesive spray. Your health care provider may recommend that you cover your wound with gauze or a bandage to keep it from getting dirty.

Any wound can become infected. Signs of infection include:

- redness
- red streaks
- swelling
- pus
- drainage
- warmth in the area of the wound
- fever
- increased pain or tenderness.

Contact your provider if you notice any of these signs.

If your wound was accidental, treatment may include taking an antibiotic to help prevent infection. You may be given a tetanus shot.

When are stitches, staples, or other types of wound closures removed?

Steri-Strips are usually left on until they fall off. If they have not fallen off after 2 weeks, they should be removed. Tissue adhesive usually falls off in 5 to 10 days. The adhesive should not be scratched or picked at.

For deep cuts the first stitches are placed under the skin. These stitches are made of materials that dissolve and do not need to be removed. Sutures or staples on the surface of the skin need to be removed by your health care provider 3 to 14 days after they are put in. Sutures in wounds on the face usually can be removed after just 3 to 5 days. In areas of high stress, such as hands, knees, or elbows, the sutures must stay in 10 to 14 days. Your provider will tell you when you should come to the office for removal of your sutures or staples. Do NOT remove sutures or staples yourself unless your provider instructs you to do so.

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