

Caring for your...Stitches

Stitches are used to repair certain types of wounds, such as cuts and tears of the skin.

Stitches close the wound, stop bleeding and help healing. This information is for wounds that are completely closed by stitches

If during the first 24 hours the wound bleeds enough to soak the bandage, remove it, and with a clean cloth firmly apply pressure for 15 minutes. When bleeding stops, reapply a clean bandage. If the bleeding doesn't stop or soaks a new bandage, seek medical care immediately.

The first 24-48 hours In the first 24 hours it is important to keep the wound clean and dry.

Activities that place stress or tension on the wound should be avoided. Paracetamol can help ease pain. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice about pain medication.

Avoid aspirin and alcohol in the first two days as these can increase the chance of bleeding and/or bruising around the wound.

If possible, raise the wound area above the level of your heart during the first 48 hours, this will help reduce the pain and swelling, and speed up recovery.

It is normal in the first day or two to see a slightly yellow ooze as the wound heals.

If you have any worries about your wound, contact the clinic where you were treated, your general practitioner or your nearest Accident & Medical centre

Cleaning After the first 48 hours, you can gently wash the wound with warm water each day. Do not soak the wound in water, e.g. bathing, swimming or washing the dishes. Avoid touching your stitches as this can cause an infection.

If you have a bandage, change it each time you wash the wound.

If you have stitches in your mouth, use a salt water mouthwash after every meal (one teaspoon of salt dissolved in a glass of water).

If you have stitches on the scalp, use a small amount of shampoo to wash your hair. Take care washing around the area of the stitches.

Antibiotics Your doctor may give you a prescription for antibiotics. Follow the instructions on the medication container carefully.

Normal healing It is normal to see redness around the wound edges and you may feel some itchiness. Some people may also feel 'tightness' and slight pain (this varies from person to person).

Infection Keep an eye on your wound for signs of infection. Signs include:

- pus or increasing amounts of smelly, coloured ooze from the wound
- increasing redness, swelling, warmth, tenderness or pain around the wound
- red streaks spreading from the wound

Seek help Seek help urgently if you suspect infection or if bleeding from the wound does not stop or soaks a new dressing after having applied pressure for 15 minutes. If you have any problems with moving or an uncomfortable sensation around the wound, have the wound checked.

Removal Most skin stitches do not dissolve and need to be removed. Usually, skin stitches need to stay in place for 5 to 10 days (depending on where they are). You will be told when to return to your health care provider for the stitches to be removed. Do not try to remove the stitches yourself.

Stitches in the mouth are usually made of a special thread that dissolves in about 7 to 10 days. It is normal for pieces to break off as they dissolve. Avoid playing with the stitches with your tongue as this can re-open the wound.