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Care of Wounds with Stitches

How do I take care of my wound?

Leave the bandage on for 24 hours unless it soaks through with blood and needs to be changed earlier. If there is oozing of blood after you leave the office, apply a new dressing and hold firm pressure over the wound for 15 to 20 minutes while elevating the area to chest height if possible. If the oozing doesn't stop after several attempts of holding firm pressure or the bleeding is more rapid, call the office immediately. Otherwise, once the oozing has stopped, place antibiotic ointment and a new dressing over the wound. Minor discomfort, swelling and a small amount of bloody drainage are not unusual during the first 24-36 hours after surgery. If the pain is not relieved with Tylenol (acetaminophen) or over time becomes more severe, please call the office. It is advisable to avoid taking aspirin and alcohol for a day or two after the surgery because these can make the wound bleed more easily.

General Wound Care

- 1) Wash the wound once daily with soap and water, rubbing alcohol or 3% hydrogen peroxide mixed with an equal volume of tap water, then
- 2) Apply an antibiotic ointment (triple antibiotic, Polysporin, bacitracin) to the wound and
- 3) Cover with a band-aid or larger bandage if needed. If your wound is in an area where it is nearly impossible to keep it covered with a bandage (e.g. scalp covered with hair), simply cover the wound several times a day with an antibiotic ointment
- 4) Change the dressing more frequently, as needed, if it becomes wet or dirty.

Can I take a bath or shower?

There is no problem taking a bath or shower as long as the wound only briefly comes in contact with water. Keep the wound covered when possible while bathing and clean it afterwards as directed above. Wounds in areas that can't be easily covered (e.g. hairy scalp) may get briefly wet while you bathe/shampoo but be gentle and don't scrub over the wound. Also, don't let the shower beat down on the wound for more than a few seconds at a time.

What about swimming and hot tub use after surgery?

Avoid immersing the wound in water for at least one to two weeks after the surgery. This means do not place the wound under water when taking a bath. You should also stay out of hot tubs and swimming pools. Soaking the wound in water may slow the healing process and increase the risk of getting an infection.

How long do I have to keep the wound covered?

Keep the wound covered with antibiotic ointment and a bandage for at least the first week. If the wound is in a location where it gets rubbed by clothing or is likely to get dirty, you may want to keep it covered longer, or at least until the stitches are removed. Covered wounds heal faster than uncovered wounds.

What else should I watch for? Beware of infection!

A small percentage of wounds will become infected after surgery. If the skin around the wound becomes red, swollen, and painful, or pus starts to drain from the area, you may have an infected wound. If these signs and symptoms develop, call the office immediately so that you can be evaluated and, if necessary, started on an antibiotic without delay. After office hours Dr. McCauliffe can be reached at (802-236-2496). Leave a message if he doesn't pick up and return the call every hour. If for some reason he has not returned the call in a few hours, call your primary care physician. If your primary care provider is unavailable go to an urgent care clinic, or the emergency room. It is normal for the wound to drain small amounts of clear or red fluid. However, if the wound drains white or yellow fluid (pus), call us immediately. Failure to call about an infected wound can have serious consequences.

What about the stitches?

Removing stitches causes little discomfort and is usually done 7-14 days after surgery, depending on the location and type of surgery that was performed. You should have been given a time when to return to have stitches removed.

What about exercise and activities?

Certain activities may need to be curtailed during the healing process. This depends on the activity and type of wound. Before engaging in exercise and other physical activities, you should inquire about the limitations from your wound.

Call (802) 773-3553 if problems arise. After hours you might also try reaching Dr. McCauliffe at (802) 236-2496.

