

Direct closure wounds

This leaflet provides information about wounds that have been closed with stitches after an operation by the plastic surgery team. The stitches may be dissolvable or may have to be removed at a later date. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

Will I be in pain?

During surgery you will have had local anaesthetic injected into your wound so that it is numb while the operation takes place. This will also help reduce the pain for a short time after the operation. Once the local anaesthetic wears off it is expected that you will feel sore. You should take simple pain relief such as paracetamol before the effects of the local anaesthetic wear off. If you find that the pain is not managed by taking regular paracetamol you should speak to your GP or a pharmacist for advice on additional pain tablets.

Do I need to have the dressing(s) changed?

It is not essential to change the dressing for a week. However if the dressing lifts off or you have been advised that it can be changed there are a number of options you can follow:

- If you are confident to do so, you can change the dressing at home. You can take the dressing(s) off and shower the wound, pat dry with a clean towel and re-cover with a dressing for protection against clothing.
- Make an appointment with your practice nurse at your local GP.
- Make an appointment with the nurses at the Plastic Dressing Clinic (PDC) if advised to by the doctor/nurse that discharges you.

Do I need to have stitches removed?

If you have dissolvable stitches they do not usually need to be removed. The surgeon will inform you that an appointment to be seen in the Plastic Dressing Clinic will be sent out to you or you will be advised to make an appointment with your GP practice nurse to have the wound inspected at 7-10 days after the operation. Dissolvable stitches take approximately 6-8 weeks to fully dissolve. Occasionally the stitches on the surface of the wound do not dissolve and do have to be removed. If you have dissolvable stitches and they have not dissolved in two weeks you can arrange an appointment with your GP Practice to have them removed.

If you have non-dissolvable stitches or staples, these will have to be removed.

Who removes the stitches?

The surgeon will advise you about when the stitches need to be removed. This will range from 5-21 days depending on the area. There are two ways this will be arranged:

1. You will be sent an appointment to attend the Plastic Dressing Clinic for removal of stitches/staples

Or

2. The surgeon will advise you to make an appointment with your GP Practice Nurse to have them removed.

Sometimes this can cause discomfort and it is recommended that you take simple pain relief such as paracetamol prior to your appointment.

After the operation what do I need to look out for?

Complications are not common but the ones to look out for are:

1. Bleeding - After 48 hours, you may notice some bleeding on your dressing. This is completely normal straight after your surgery. However if the wound continues to bleed or leak fluid, an appointment will need to be made for a registered nurse to review the wound. You can do either of the following:
 - Make an appointment with your practice nurse at your local GP
 - Make an appointment with the nurses at the Plastic Dressing Clinic (PDC)
 - Attend a local Urgent Care or Walk In centre.

If bleeding is continuous you should seek medical attention via an Emergency Department (ED) immediately.

2. Pain – if your wound is causing you significant discomfort and an increase in pain, this could indicate the following:
 - Putting too much strain on the wound, you need to rest the area to allow the damaged skin to heal.
 - Increased pain could be a sign of infection.

If pain is continuous you should seek medical attention via your GP or an ED.

3. Infection - It is important to look out for signs of infection. If you develop any of the following symptoms, please seek medical advice straight away:
 - Redness and heat surrounding the wound
 - An increase in pain
 - Discharge from the wound
 - Generally feeling unwell in yourself
 - Fever (temperature above 38°C).

If any of the above symptoms occur, please seek medical attention immediately. You can contact the nurses in the Plastic Dressing Clinic first as they may have a space to see you. However, if this is not possible we recommend that you arrange an appointment with your GP or attend an ED.

How do I look after my scar when it has healed?

A scar will be left once the wound has healed. How visible the scar is differs from person to person and will continue to change over time.

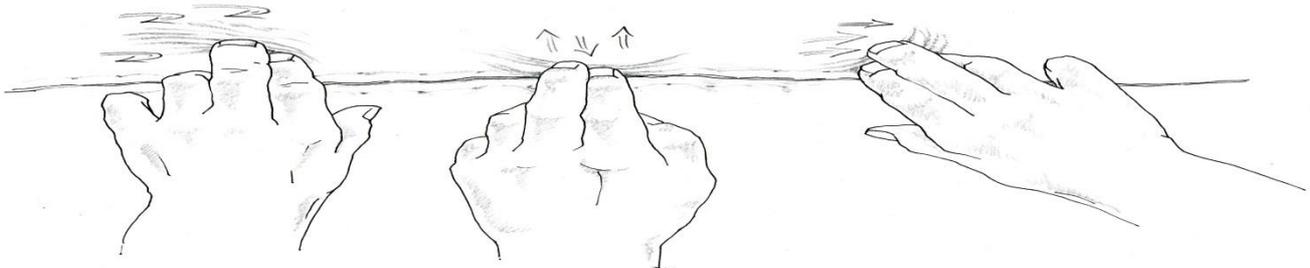
After all dressings, and any stitches or staples have been removed or have dissolved from your wound, the scar will begin to remodel to look more like the surrounding skin and get stronger. It will always be more fragile than it was before the operation so needs protection.

Scarred skin can become thick, lumpy, dry and itchy. To combat this, scar massage and moisturising can be started as soon as the wound is healed. It is recommended that you massage the scar 2-3 times a day for 5-10 minutes each time to help soften it, to prevent skin breakdown and improve appearance.

Massage the scar with circular movements, and also in movements straight across the scar. Use a **non-perfumed** moisturising ointment that you routinely use or cream such as 50/50 paraffin or E45 cream.

Start gently and then you can begin to apply more pressure. This will aid the scar to mature and become lighter (blanch). Refer to figure 1.

Figure 1



It is also important to keep your scar away from direct sunlight. Scars are especially sensitive and can burn easily in the sun. We recommend that you always use a high factor sun cream on your scar when exposed in direct sunlight.

When can I return to normal activities?

This will differ between individual circumstances, the type of operation, and your level of pain.

Most wounds take a minimum of two weeks to begin to heal and get stronger so you are advised to avoid activities that could put strain on your wound.

However, some areas need further restrictions. For example, if you have had surgery on a limb it is advised that you elevate to reduce any swelling, do not drive, avoid exercise and avoid heavy lifting. The type and size of your wound and the extent of your injury will determine how long these restrictions should be followed. The clinic nurse in PDC will discuss this with you.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Depending on the type of operation you will usually have a follow up appointment approximately one week after discharge with one of the nurses in the Plastic Dressing Clinic or your practice nurse at your GP to check on your wound. Most patients will be given or sent a follow up with your consultant at later date, approximately four weeks – three months after you have been discharged.

All hospital appointments will either be made before you leave hospital or the details will be given to you by phone or sent by post.

If you have not heard about your appointments within 3-4 working days of your discharge, please contact plastic surgery appointments on 020 8725 5855.

Useful sources of information

Sun smart www.cancerresearchuk.org

NHS Choices - How should I care for my stitches? <https://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx>

NHS Choices - Scars <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scars/>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your direct closure wound, please contact the Plastic Dressing Clinic nurses on 020 8725 0473 or the lead clinical nurse in plastic surgery by calling 020 8672 1071 and then asking the operator to bleep number 6332 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

Out of hours, please contact Keate ward on 020 8725 3226 /3227.

For plastic surgery appointments, contact 020 8725 5855.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111



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