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WOUND CARE AFTER MINOR SURGERY

This general guide is designed to provide background information about the care your wound needs after the operation that you have undergone. It aims to supplement verbal discussion, to answer common questions and to be readily available as an *aide memoir*. It cannot cover in detail every aspect of your individual operation and may not deal with some areas that are of particular concern to you. These can be dealt with individually.

You should feel free to ask about any aspect of your care. All your questions will be answered fully, honestly and in as much detail as you wish. In the heat of the moment it is easy for questions that you intended to ask to slip from your mind. You should note on paper any questions that you may have.

Further information is available at the web site above. This site also provides links to other sites that may provide additional information.

Pain relief.

The operation was performed under local anaesthetic and this will provide pain relief for four to six hours. You are then likely to require some tablets for pain relief. Panadol or Panadeine should be adequate. You should take the first of these before the local anaesthetic wears off and you should remember that pain relieving drugs work best if you anticipate the pain. A small quantity of the drug taken regularly (even if pain free at that time) will work better than waiting for the pain to occur and then taking a larger dose of the drug. Most patients do not require oral pain relief for more than 48 hours. However, you may still wish to continue with pain tablets at night.

Wound care

Almost all patients having minor surgery under local anaesthetic go home the day of surgery.

The wound is closed with stitches that are under the skin. They will be absorbed and do not need to be removed. Steristrips will be placed over the incision, and on top of that a plaster. In some cases a compression dressing may be placed over the plaster.

The compression dressing (if used) can be removed the day after surgery. The plaster will tolerate a shower or a quick splash in a bath, but do not soak it. The plaster that is on the wound when you leave the hospital should be removed no later than 48 hours after the surgery and the steristrips no later than four days after the surgery. If they become dirty or start to fall off before that they can be removed. Thus by 96 hours all the original dressings should have been removed. The incision will be covered by new cells and can then be left open.

After washing the wound it should be padded rather than rubbed dry. Adding salt to the bath will not help heal the wound and may make your skin dry and tight. You should not soak the wound or swim for at least ten days. If the incision is a bit sensitive you can cover it with a new plaster, but it should be left open at night.

A major concern to patients is that they will strain the wound and that it will rupture. With today's suture materials this is very unlikely. On the very few occasions that a wound does rupture it will be before you leave hospital. This would require an operation to repair the rupture. Once you have gone home a rupture is almost unheard of. If you 'over do it' the worst that will happen is that the wound will be very sore.

Wounds progress through several stages of healing. You may experience:-

- unusual tingling, numbness or itching sensations.
- a slightly hard or 'lumpy' feeling as new tissues form.
- pulling around the stitches or staples as the wound heals.

This is normal. Do not pull at any scabs as they act as a natural dressing and protect the new skin underneath. They will fall off when no longer required. You should seek help if any of the following occur:-

- the wound pain increases
- the wound becomes more reddened or swollen
- there is any discharge from the wound

What can go wrong.

It is normal to have some pain for up to 48 hours but thereafter the discomfort should fade away fairly quickly. If you find the pain starts to increase after the fourth or fifth day or the wound becomes swollen, red or discharges some fluid, you should seek advice of your General Practitioner. It is not unusual for there to be some bruising around the wound and this will fade over three to four weeks. There may be some thickening round the wound and this may not soften for at least three months.