

After your minor plastic surgery procedure

Information for patients

This leaflet explains how to take care of your wound(s) when you leave the hospital. If you have any questions, please contact us using the details at the end of this leaflet.

Will I have any pain?

The local anaesthetic will begin to wear off a few hours after your operation. If you experience any discomfort from the site of your surgery, you can take over-the-counter pain medication, available from any pharmacy, to help with this.

Always follow the instructions on the packet and never take more than the recommended dose. Please check with the pharmacist that the pain medication does not interfere with any other medication you are taking or any medical condition(s) you have. Please also tell them if you are allergic to any medication.

How should I expect the wound to heal?

All wounds go through several stages of healing. You may be able to see these changes as they progress.

1. **Inflammation** – days one to five (not same as infection – see below): reddening, swelling, clear or straw coloured non-smelly discharge and slight pain.
2. **Formation of scab** – days 5-14: a protective covering.
3. **Strengthening & flattening** – these often occur and are normal:
 - tingling or slight itching
 - slight lumpy feeling as the new tissue forms
 - bruising around the wound
 - pulling feeling around your stitches

How should I look after my wound?

You should keep the dressing dry and only change if it appears to have soaked through (ie the dressing is wet to touch). If there are dry patches seen on the dressing, it is okay to leave it as it is for five to seven days. If you need to change the dressing, you can do this under running water or shower which may help you find it less painful. It is important to wash your wound when you change the dressing as this helps to remove bacteria and keep it clean. Ensure you pat the wound dry afterwards. You should not bathe the affected area for at least two weeks. Your doctor or nurse will provide you with more advice specific to the type of operation you have had.

If you do not have a dressing (often if the wound is on the face) keep it clean and cover it with a thick layer of Vaseline®. This helps to keep your wound moist, which should help it heal faster, with less scarring. Paper tapes called 'Steri-Strips' are also often used to support the wound. These should be left on as long as possible (ideally for 14 days), but will start peeling off if they get wet. Your doctor or nurse will advise about care of Steristrips

What do I do if the wound starts bleeding?

Do not panic if this happens. Sit down and press firmly over the dressing for 15 minutes. If the surgery was on a limb (arm or leg) you should also elevate it while pressing. It is normal to have a little bit of oozing when the local anaesthetic starts to wear off. You can add another layer of dressing on top to apply pressure. If you are at all worried, please phone the hospital using the contact details below.

Do I need to have the stitches removed?

There are two types of stitches we use; some will need to be removed and some will not. As a general rule, if they are coloured (black or blue), they must be removed. Clear stitches are usually dissolvable and the stitch which ends above your skin should be trimmed by your practice nurse at your GP surgery. We will tell you when and where you must have your stitches removed before you leave.

What can I do to heal better and have an acceptable scar?

If you smoke, you should stop. Smoking cigarettes slows down wound healing, increases the risk of complications and makes scarring more unsightly. If you are unable to stop, try to avoid smoking for at least a week after your surgery, longer if possible.

Try to avoid any unnecessary exercise and exertion for at least six weeks, as this may cause your wound to stretch. If you had surgery on one of your limbs, you must elevate it to reduce swelling as much as possible. If it was on your face or head, sleep with extra pillows.

After two weeks, start massaging your scar. Scars can be greatly helped by being massaged firmly with a non-perfumed cream such as E45. A mix of circular and straight across movements should be used, and this should be done six times a day. A scar takes 18 months to fully mature.

It is important to protect the scar from the sun while it is maturing, as it will tan easily and you may end up with a dark pigmented scar.

When to seek help

The following symptoms are signs of infection. If you experience any of them, you should **contact your GP or clinic 4** as soon as possible for advice:

- unpleasant odour
- excessive pus/discharge (thick, green or cream coloured)
- swelling
- redness
- increased pain, throbbing or heat in the wound area
- spontaneous bleeding
- if you feel unwell and have temperature.

Contact numbers

- Plastic surgery – clinic 4 at the Royal Free Hospital (open Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm): 020 7794 0500 extension: 31312
- Mount Vernon Hospital – dressing clinic (open Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm): 01923 844 395

For advice out of hours, please visit your local emergency department, contact your GP out of hours service or ring NHS 111 for further advice.

Your follow-up arrangements:

- Please arrange to have the stitches removed by the practice nurse at your GP surgery on: If this is not possible, please contact us for advice.
- Your stitches are dissolvable. You may need to arrange for the practice nurse at your GP surgery to trim the ends for you two weeks after surgery.
- You will need to attend the plastic surgery dressing clinic at the Royal Free Hospital / Mount Vernon Hospital for a wound check / a graft check / removal of stitches on:
.....
- Please attend for an out-patient appointment on:
.....

More information

For more information about the plastic surgery service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website:

www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/plastic-surgery

Your feedback

If you have any comments on this leaflet or require a list of references for it, please email: rf.communications@nhs.net.

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

© Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust

Service: Plastic surgery department

Version number: 1

Approval date: April 2019

Review date: April 2021

www.royalfree.nhs.uk