



Dr. Edward Kelly
www.edwardkellymd.com

General Wound Care Guidelines for Post-Surgical Patients

Nothing ruins a great surgery like an unfortunate wound infection! Here a few simple guidelines to follow when caring for your incision(s) after surgery:

Immediately after surgery through your first post-op appointment:

Different dressings may be used for different surgeries. Generally, you will have sutures or staples closing your surgical incision. When staples are not used, we usually place Steri-strips over the incision, which are adhesive pieces of tape that help hold skin edges together as it heals. Over the Steri-strips, we will place what we call the “bulky” dressing. This consists of 4x4 gauze pads, an absorbent pad, and sometimes cotton-like wrap with an ACE bandage over it.

- Within the first 24-48 hours after surgery, you can remove the “bulky” dressing and only the Steri-strips need to remain on your skin.
- There will likely be dried blood or clear drainage on the “bulky” dressings you take off. This is normal.
- You can shower over the Steri-strips but DO NOT soak in any tub, pool, lake, etc. Also, do not scrub over the Steri-strips. Let the clean, soapy water wash over them.
- Except for when you are showering, keep your incision dry. Avoid any lotions, ointments, leaky ice packs, excessive sweating, etc.
- If the Steri-strips do fall off before your post-op appointment, you can cover your incision with a band-aid or come to the clinic for new steri-strips.

After your first post-op appointment:

Usually at the first post-op appointment, we will check your incision for signs of infection or irritation. The Steri-strips put on during surgery will be removed and usually new ones will be placed over your incision.



- The new Steri-strips should stay on for another 1-2 weeks. Again, you can shower over these but still should not soak or scrub. They usually fall off after 2 weeks, but if they stay on longer than 2 weeks, you can take them off.
- Your skin can take 6 weeks or more to fully heal. Until it is COMPLETELY healed, the scabs have fallen off, and only a scar remains, a shower is the only time it should get wet. You should avoid:
 - Pools, hot tubs, lakes, or baths (including Epsom salt baths)
 - Lotions, gels, ointments
 - Picking at scabs or touching the incision too much

Warning signs that may indicate a skin infection:

If you experience any of the following symptoms, please contact the care team right away. We will be happy to make an urgent appointment to see you if you have post-surgical wound concerns, or you can present to our orthopedic urgent care walk-in clinic (open 7 days a week from 8am-8pm). Here are things to watch for:

- Fevers (over 100.4 degrees), chills, nausea, or vomiting
- Drainage or leaking from your incisions, especially if white or yellow in color. Some blood or clear drainage from the incision after surgery is to be expected.
- Extremely warm skin at or right around the incision. After surgery, you will likely have swelling and some warmth at your incision but look for an increase in warmth where the skin feels hot to the touch.
- Redness right around the incision, especially if it expands over time.
- Any bumps or blisters around the incision
- Swelling that seems increased from where it should be after surgery. This can be hard to judge because you will likely have swelling after your surgery. It never hurts to call the care team or get it looked at.

***If you experience any of the above symptoms, please call the office. It is better to be safe than sorry! In the case of a wound infection, when it is caught early, it can often be treated with antibiotics. However, infections that go untreated often become more severe and even life-threatening, and these may require another surgery to clean out the wound. This is your body and your health. Your surgeon, PA, and the rest of the staff have done everything they can do to ensure a successful outcome for you. Please do everything YOU can do to avoid a wound infection. Thank you!