

*Helping you care for your wound and prevent infection after the surgery.*

### What is a surgical wound?

A surgical wound is a cut made in your skin by your surgeon during a surgical procedure.

### How are surgical wounds held together?

Wounds are closed with stitches (sometimes called sutures), metal clips, staples or glue. What is used depends on the type of surgery, the type of wound and the area of your body.

### What can you and your family/whanau do to prevent surgical site infections?

You can help take care of your surgical wound by following the instructions of your surgeon and/or nurse.

Before your operation:

- Tell us about other health problems you might have such as diabetes or skin conditions - these could affect your surgery and your treatment.
- If you smoke, ask us about being referred to your local smoking cessation programme to provide support to stop smoking before your surgery. Smoking can delay wound healing and increase the risk of developing an infection.
- Don't shave near the area where you are having surgery.
- Let us know if you have any skin lesions, cuts, scratches or rashes near the area where you are having surgery.

### Is my wound healing okay?

As your wound heals, it's normal to experience some of the following:

- Stiffness and soreness, which will ease off after a few days
- Tingling, numbness or itching
- A slightly hard, lumpy feeling as new tissue forms
- Slight pulling around the stitches as the wound heals.

Don't pick off any scabs, as they protect the new tissue under the wound and act as nature's dressing. They will fall off on their own.

### My wound is swelling

Some swelling around a wound is normal. If your wound seems very swollen, or the swelling is getting worse or causing problems, contact your surgeon, their practice nurse or your GP for advice. Elevating the wounded part (if possible) can reduce pain and swelling.

**My wound is bleeding**

If your wound bleeds, press a clean cloth to the area, firmly and continuously, for 10-15 minutes. Slowly release the pressure to check if the bleeding has stopped. If bleeding is excessive or persistent, seek medical advice immediately while keeping pressure on the wound. Contact your surgeon, their practice nurse or your GP for advice. If out of normal business hours, contact an after-hours service.

**My wound is coming apart**

Occasionally, a wound may break open. Cover the wound with a clean dressing and contact your surgeon, their practice nurse or your GP for advice.

**My wound is painful**

If you have had a local anaesthetic, the effects will wear off after 2 to 4 hours and you may need some pain relief. You can use the tablets that have been prescribed, or you can take paracetamol. Don't take aspirin for pain as it can cause bleeding in some people. However, if you normally take an aspirin a day, don't stop unless advised to by your healthcare provider. Elevating the wounded part can reduce pain and swelling.

If you are taking the pain relieve as prescribed and still have pain that is not manageable, contact your surgeon, their practice nurse or your GP for advice.

**What is a surgical site infection?**

A surgical site infection (SSI) is the infection of the surgical wound. Some SSIs only involve the skin, but others are more serious and can involve the tissues under the skin, organs or implanted material such as joint replacements.

A lot of wounds heal without any problems. However, the most common complication after surgery is wound infection. It is important to recognise the signs and symptoms of wound infection early, as it can delay healing and lead to the need for further treatment or hospitalisation.

**Symptoms of a surgical site infection**

If you notice any of the following signs or symptoms, contact your surgeon, their practice nurse or your GP for advice:

If you:

- Develop a fever (feeling hot and/or cold and unwell)

Or, if your wound:

- Becomes more painful
- Looks red or swollen
- Feels hot to the touch
- Leaks a yellow or green discharge
- Has an unpleasant smell

## **Can surgical site infections be treated?**

Yes, most SSIs can be treated with antibiotics. Sometimes patients with SSIs also need more surgery to treat the infection.

## **How will we work in partnership with you to prevent SSIs?**

### **To prevent SSIs, doctors, nurses and other healthcare staff will:**

- Clean their hands and arms up to their elbows with antiseptic just before the operation.
- Wear hair covers, masks, gowns and gloves during the operation to keep the surgery area clean.
- Remove your hair around the operation site using electric clippers (we do not use razors as these can irritate the skin making it easier to develop an infection).
- Clean your skin at the operation site with an antiseptic that kills bacteria (germs).
- Always clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol based hand rub before and after caring for you and other patients.

### **To prevent SSIs, you should:**

- Keep the wound clean and dry.
- Change the dressing as instructed by the Surgeon or Nurse.
- Wash your hands before and after touching your wound.
- Avoid trauma, pressure or friction to your wound.
- Stop smoking.
- Watch for the signs and symptoms of SSIs and seek advice promptly when required.

***If you have any concerns about your wound, please seek medical advice. Contact your surgeon, their practice nurse, your GP or an after-hours medical service.***