**When Can I Remove the Dressing From My Incision Line?**

If your surgical wound was closed by staples or stitches and is not draining, you do not need to wear a dressing, unless your surgeon has said otherwise. You may also choose to wear a dressing to protect the area.

**When Can I Shower?**

Surgeons have different views about showering after surgery. Some surgeons say it’s okay to shower 48 hours after your surgery, once your incision is no longer draining. Some prefer you not shower or avoid getting the incision line wet, until after the stitches/staples are out and the wound is not draining. You must ask your surgeon and follow their instructions. If your surgeon doesn’t want you to get your incision line wet but you want to shower, you can ask your surgeon if it would be okay to put an occlusive film dressing over your dressing to allow you to shower right before your scheduled dressing changes.

**What Can I Do To Help?**

You are an important member of your wound care team. To help heal your surgical wound:

- Keep your dressing clean and dry;
- Change your dressing as instructed by your nurse. If you or a family member, friend, or neighbor is able to change the dressing, you will be taught;
- Recognize the signs wound infection and get help right away;
- Stop smoking;
- Eat a well-balanced diet and drink lots of non-caffeinated fluids;
- Take your medications as instructed by your doctor;
- Keep your blood sugars in good control (if you have diabetes);
- Get to and/or maintain a healthy body weight;
- Follow your surgeons instructions about exercise (especially stretching and pulling exercises), heavy lifting, sports, and straining after your surgery;
- Limit the exposure of your surgical wound to the sun for at least six months after the wound has healed (wear sunscreen or protective clothes);
- Wear any binders or supportive garments as your surgeon told you to;
- Follow your surgeons instructions about showering/bathing;
- Avoid trauma, pressure or friction to the wound, and;
- Keep pain under control.

**Questions to Ask Your Doctor**

As a person with a surgical wound you should be following up with your surgeon and/or doctor. At these visits you should be asking:

- Is my HgbA1c 7% or less, and if not, what can I do to improve it (if you have diabetes)?
- Am I at an ideal body weight, and if not, what can I do to get there?
- Can you help me to stop or reduce smoking/drinking alcohol?
- When can I shower?
- Are there any exercise/activity restrictions?
- Who is taking my stitches/staples out and when?

For more information on surgical wounds, nutrition, wound healing, and for community resources, go to: swrwoundcareprogram.ca
What’s a Surgical Wound?
A surgical wound is an opening in your skin from a surgical procedure. Surgical wounds heal in one of three ways:

- **Primary intention**: wounds that are stitched, stapled, or glued shut during the surgery;
- **Secondary intention**: wounds that are left open on purpose during the surgery. This is done to let them heal over time by slowly filling in with new tissue, or;
- **Tertiary intention**: wounds that are left open during the surgery and then closed with stitches or staples a week after surgery.

Regardless of the type of surgery, how well your surgical wound heals can be impacted by:

- The physical environment before and during surgery;
- Surgical preparation and techniques;
- The type of stitches used;
- The length of time you spent in the hospital before your surgery. The shorter you are in the hospital before surgery, the less your risk for complications;
- The way your skin was cleaned before the surgery. It’s best to shower immediately before surgery using hexachlorophene soap;
- If and how you or a health care professional shaved the operative area before surgery. It’s best to use a depilatory cream, electric razor, or clippers to remove hair the morning of the surgery;
- The type of surgery and whether or not there were complications;
- The quality of blood flow to the surgical site;
- How your body responded to the stress of the surgery;
- Whether or not you were kept warm, hydrated, and oxygenated right after the surgery;
- How well your pain is controlled;
- Your age, immune system function, and blood sugar control;
- How well you other health conditions are controlled before, during, and after your surgery, and;
- The quality of your nutrition and hydration.

Because of these complications, sometimes a wound that is closed with stitches, staples, or glue can open up (please let your surgeon know right away if this happens). In this case, the opening must be left to fill in with new tissue. The above listed complications can also affect the healing of secondary and tertiary intention surgical wounds.

What’s a Surgical Site Infection?
A surgical site infection (SSI) is one that happens within the first 30 days after your surgery (within one year if you had a medical device implanted). SSI’s are a complication of your surgery. These infections can increase the time you spend in hospital after your surgery and can delay wound healing. Signs of SSI include:

- Green, brown, dark yellow, thick, and/or foul smelling drainage. This drainage may increase in amounts over time;
- Increased pain around the wound;
- Increased swelling, hardness, warmth, and/or redness around the wound;
- Fever of over 38° Celsius (37° Celsius in the elderly);
- An opening in your incision line (if it was previously stitched, stapled, or glued shut), and/or,
- A tired feeling that does not go away.

Your risk of getting a SSI may be higher if you:

- Have respiratory or cardiac disease or diabetes;
- Are overweight;
- Have poor nutrition and/or hydration;
- Needed to have an emergency surgery;
- Needed to have a medical device implanted;
- Already had an infection in your body, i.e. A urinary tract infection, and/or;
- Are taking a steroid medication.

When Will My Stitches/Staples Be Taken Out?
Your surgeon will tell you when your stitches/staples will be taken out, and by whom. Stitches/staples on the surface of your skin are usually taken out 3-21 days after your surgery. This depends on:

- Your surgeon’s practices;
- The type of surgery you had;
- The site of your surgical wound, and
- How quickly you heal.

Some surface stitches absorb and disappear on their own and do not need removed. Deep stitches are usually never taken out.

Once your stitches/staples are taken out, your healthcare provider may put Steri-Strips across the incision line. This is to help keep the line from splitting open. Steri-Strips are to be left in place and allowed to fall off on their own. If they do not fall off, or only partially fall off, it’s okay to take them off seven days later.