



Suture Care

Some sutures need to be removed by a health care provider. Others dissolve on their own. Sometimes strips of tape are used. You'll be told what kind of sutures you have.

Sutures (stitches) are used to close wounds. Sutures also help stop bleeding and speed healing. To help your wound heal, follow the tips on this handout.

Keep sutures clean

- Avoid doing things that could cause dirt or sweat to get on your sutures. If necessary, cover your sutures with a dressing or bandage to protect them.
- Don't pick at scabs. They help protect the wound.
- Don't wash the area around your sutures unless your doctor says it's OK. Then, follow his or her instructions for washing and drying.

When to seek medical care

Call your doctor or health care provider if you notice any of the following signs:

- Increased soreness, pain, or tenderness after 24 hours
- A red streak, increased redness, or puffiness near the wound
- White, yellowish, or bad smelling discharge from the wound
- Bleeding that can't be stopped by applying pressure
- Steri-Strips fall off or stitches dissolve before the wound heals
- Fever over 100.1°F (37.8°C)

Keep sutures dry

- Keep your sutures out of water.
- To keep sutures dry when around water, cover them with a plastic bag. Take the plastic bag off when you are not around water. You can also use rubber gloves to protect sutures on a hand.
- If sutures get damp, pat them dry.

Changing your dressing

Leave the dressing (bandage) in place until you are told to remove it or change it. Change it only as directed, using clean hands:

- After the first ___ hours, change your dressing every ___ hours.
- Change your dressing if it gets wet or soiled.

Other tips

- To help wounds on an arm or leg heal, use the limb as little as possible.
- To help reduce swelling and throbbing, raise the area with sutures above your heart.
- To help prevent itching, cover sutures with gauze. If sutures itch, try not to scratch them.
- For pain relief, try acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Don't use aspirin. It can increase bleeding.