

Emergency Department Online

WOUND CARE

Your wound may have been treated with stitches, glue, adhesive strips, or left to heal by itself. This leaflet explains how to look after yourself at home, what signs to watch for, and when to seek medical advice. It also includes guidance on activity, hygiene, and ways to promote healthy healing and recovery.

What is wound care?

Wound care plays a vital role in healing, preventing infection, and reducing scarring. Whether your wound was closed with stitches, glue, adhesive strips, or left to heal by itself, this leaflet provides all the information you need to support your recovery at home.

General wound care advice

For the first 24–48 hours:

- Keep the wound clean and dry. This allows the edges to seal and protects against infection
- Leave the dressing in place unless advised otherwise. It acts as a barrier to bacteria and dirt.
- If instructed to remove the dressing, do so with clean hands

Ongoing Wound Care:

- Do not scratch, rub, or pick at the wound or scab - even if it becomes itchy. This can delay healing or cause infection.
- Avoid soaking the wound (e.g., in baths, swimming pools, or hot tubs) for at least 5–7 days, or as advised.

- Shower instead of bathing, and carefully pat the area dry with a clean towel. Do not rub.
- Wear loose clothing around the wound site to avoid friction or irritation.
- If your dressing becomes wet, loose, or dirty, replace it with a clean, dry, non-stick dressing.

Activity and movement

- Avoid sports, heavy lifting, or strenuous activities until your healthcare provider says it's safe. Depending on the area, movement can stretch the wound, increase bleeding risk, or delay healing.
- For wounds over joints or limbs, avoid movements that could cause the wound to reopen
- If your wound is on your foot or leg, elevate the limb when resting to reduce swelling

Wound closure methods and care: stitches (sutures)

Usually removed in 5-14 days, depending on the wound's location:

- Face: 5-7 days
- Joints: 10-14 days
- Rest of the body: 7-10 days
- Keep dry for at least the first 24 hours. After that, you may be allowed to shower, but do not soak.

Wound closure methods and care: steri-strips (adhesive strips)

- Keep dry and intact for at least 5 days, unless they fall off earlier
- To remove, soak gently in warm water, then peel from one end
- Do not pull or tug - if strips are stuck, consult a healthcare professional

Wound closure methods and care: skin glue (tissue adhesive)

- Skin glue forms a protective layer over the wound that peels off naturally over 5–10 days
- Keep the area dry for 5 days
- Do not cover unless advised, and avoid picking or peeling the glue
- Avoid using ointments or creams unless prescribed, as they may dissolve the glue

Signs your wound is healing normally

- Mild redness, swelling, or tenderness around the wound (especially during the first 1–3 days)
- Scabbing or the wound closing over
- No significant pain or discharge
- Gradual return to normal skin colour and texture

Signs of wound infection

- Contact your GP, a walk-in centre, or call NHS 111 if you notice any of the following:
- Redness spreading around the wound or a hot sensation
- Increasing pain, throbbing, or tenderness
- Swelling that's getting worse, not better
- Yellow or green discharge, or fluid that smells unpleasant
- The wound has opened up or appears to be gaping
- You feel generally unwell, tired, or feverish
- A temperature above 38°C (100.4°F)
- Infection can usually be treated with antibiotics but should be addressed early to avoid complications

Preventing infection and promoting healing

- Wash hands thoroughly before and after touching your wound or dressing
- Avoid contact with unclean surfaces or environments (e.g., gardening, pets, crowded public places)
- Avoid smoking, as it slows down wound healing and increases infection risk.
- Stay well hydrated and eat a balanced diet with plenty of protein and vitamin C to support tissue repair

When to seek immediate medical advice

Go to A&E or call 999 if:

- The wound is bleeding heavily and won't stop
- The wound has suddenly reopened, especially after surgery
- You suspect a foreign object remains in the wound (e.g., glass, metal)
- You develop signs of sepsis (a life-threatening infection), including:
 - Very high or very low body temperature
 - Rapid breathing or heart rate
 - Confusion or drowsiness
 - Cold, pale, or blotchy skin

Aftercare and follow-up

- Attend any dressing change or suture removal appointments
- Follow all instructions provided after surgical procedures
- If you're unsure whether a wound needs redressing or further care, ask your nurse, GP, or pharmacist



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Frequently asked questions

Can I use antiseptic cream on the wound?

Only if advised by your healthcare provider. Some antiseptics can irritate the wound or slow healing.

What should I do if a scab forms?

Leave it alone. A scab is the body's natural protection. Picking it can delay healing and increase scarring.

How do I reduce scarring?

After healing, keeping the area moisturised and using sun protection can help reduce scarring. Your clinician may recommend silicone gel or sheets for some scars.

Where to get help

- GP surgery – for follow-up appointments and non-urgent advice
- NHS 111 – for medical help when your GP is unavailable
- Walk-in centres – for wound reviews and dressing changes
- Pharmacy – for minor wound care products and basic advice