

Closed Laceration Care

Steri-Strips®

Steri-Strips® are small adhesive bandages used to close shallow lacerations and hold the edges of the skin together while it is healing. Steri-Strips® will come off in about 4 to 5 days. They will curl up at the edges as the wound heals. Trim the edges of the Steri-Strips® with scissors as they curl up, if needed. Gently remove them with tweezers if they do not come off in 7 days. Pull them off from the side toward the center.

Tissue Glue (Dermabond® or Indermil®)

Tissue glue is a sterile, liquid adhesive that holds wound edges together to heal. It is not the same as Super Glue®. The tissue glue film will usually remain in place for 5 to 10 days. After this it will peel off of your skin on its own. Keep the area dry. You may wash the area gently in 48 hours. Do not rub, scratch or pick at the tissue glue. Protect the wound from sunlight or tanning lamps while it is in place. Do not place tape directly over the film. Avoid contact with any type of ointment, and any product that contains acetone, such as fingernail polish remover. If a bandage was placed keep it dry and replace it if it becomes wet.

Sutures (Stitches)

Sutures are made of special surgical thread. Deeper cuts may need sutures to repair deep structures (such as fascia, the connective tissue envelope around a muscle). Do not get sutures wet for the first 48 to 72 hours and then gently wash around the site as directed below. Avoid any activity that could re-injure the wound. If a bandage was placed, change it when it becomes dirty. Do not bandage it after 3 days. Keep a bandage over them when in a potentially dirty environment. Allow the cut to be open to the air otherwise.

Skin Staples

Staples are made of a special surgical metal and function like sutures in areas where scarring is less of a concern like the scalp. A bandage is usually unnecessary. Do not get them wet for the first 48 to 72 hours (or as your doctor directs). After 3 days the area can be gently washed.

Suture or Staple Removal

Whenever sutures or staples are placed, it is always advised to have them removed in a specific number of days. The number of days will vary depending on where the laceration occurred on the body – usually after 4 to 14 days. Facial stitches may be removed after 4 days and no later than 7 days. Other areas of the body require longer healing time. Sutures in your hand may be left in 14 or more days because of slower healing and greater tension on the wound. The doctor who placed the stitches will often recommend the number of days before this follow-up. **Note: Your doctor will tell you when to have the sutures or staples removed. Do not attempt to remove them yourself.**

Care of a Closed Wound

Be sure you schedule an appointment for wound re-check and suture or staple removal according to the directions given to you by the doctor. A wound check without suture removal may be recommended after 1 or 2 days, especially if the chance of infection is thought to be higher than usual, or if changing the bandage is difficult. Be gentle with a healing cut for the first six weeks. It takes that long for a wound to achieve about 80% of its final healed strength. Total healing will take 6 to 12 months. Your doctor may recommend keeping the wound dry for the first number of days. Wash the wound daily with some cool water and a little soap (mild dishwashing soap works well). Rinse the area by pouring water from a cup rather than placing the wound directly under the forceful water of a shower. Pat dry after washing or showering, and do not rub the wound. **NOTE: Never soak sutures, staples, or Steri-Strips® in water. Never use rubbing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, iodine or mercurochrome on a wound – it can harm the tissue and slow healing.**

Different bandages are chosen for their different material properties. Some materials are better because they won't stick to your cut (Telfa® gauze). Others are more absorbent, provide needed surface pressure, or help to keep an injury immobile. Pressure bandages or splints may be applied by your healthcare provider for certain injuries. If you use a cloth-like bandage, apply a clean bandage when it gets wet or soiled to further help prevent infection. If a bandage is stuck to a scab, soak it in warm water to soften the scab and make the bandage easier to remove.

NOTE: Antibiotic ointment (such as Bacitracin® or Neosporin®) should be used for abrasions (scrapes) only – NEVER on sutures, staples, Steri-Strips®, or tissue glue. Do not use scar creams while sutures, staples, Steri-Strips®, or tissue glue is in place.

Additional Care

Antibiotics are usually not needed unless there is significant risk of infection. For example, wounds caused by animal bites, human bites or marine life will likely need antibiotics. If an antibiotic prescription was given, be certain that it is used in the manner and frequency prescribed. Keep in mind that inflammation from wound healing and stitches can cause minor redness around the wound edges and is normal. You may need to see special caregivers such as an orthopedic or plastic surgeon if the injury has hurt bone, nerves or blood vessels in your body. It is very important to keep these appointments. Avoid sun exposure as newly healed tissue burns more easily and is often left discolored. Use extra sunscreen (SPF 25 or greater) in the summer to protect newly healed skin.

Infections

Whenever skin is broken, germs can enter and develop an infection, and this is the biggest medical concern in the first few weeks. Even with proper treatment a wound may become infected. Sometimes the germs that enter a cut can get into the bloodstream and make a person severely ill. Also, an infected wound will not heal properly. Call your doctor if you have any of the following signs or symptoms of infection:

- Increased warmth around the area
- Redness or swelling to the area that gets worse instead of better, or any red streaks
- Pain in the area that increases instead of decreases over time.
- You have pus or drainage from the wound. Pus is a fluid that may drain from a wound that is infected. Pus is milky (not clear) and may be white, yellow, green, or brown.
- A bad smell from the wound
- Fever and chills or temperature over 100.3°f
- Excessive wound swelling
- Any weakness or numbness (such as if you can't move or feel a finger after a cut on the hand)
- If you are unsure of how to care for your wound or have questions

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away. This is general information and not specific medical advice. Always consult your doctor with any questions or concerns.

