

# Wound Closure and Wound Care

## What is wound closure?

Wound closure is a procedure that your healthcare provider can do to hold the edges of a wound together. Most wounds heal more quickly, and with less risk of infection and scarring, when the wound is kept clean and the edges are held close together as it heals.

Cuts and punctures are wounds that go through several layers of skin and may go into the fat, muscle, blood vessels, or other tissues under the skin. A cut through your skin made by a healthcare provider when you have surgery is another type of wound that may need closure.

Your healthcare provider will close large, deep, or jagged wounds and most surgical wounds with skin glue, tape strips, stitches, or staples. If you have not had a tetanus shot in the last 5 years, and you have a dirty wound, your healthcare provider may give you a tetanus shot.

It is very important to follow your provider's instructions to help the wound heal, to prevent an infection, and to lessen scarring.

## How can I take care of myself?

Follow the instructions from your healthcare provider for taking care of the wound. Instructions may include:

- Keep the wound clean and dry. Don't get the wound wet unless your healthcare provider has told you it's OK.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15 seconds before you touch the area.
- If you have a bandage over the wound, follow your provider's instructions for cleaning the wound and changing the bandage. Don't use any ointment, cream, or lotion on the wound unless your provider has told you to do so.
- If your wound is on your arm or leg, you may need to keep the wound up higher than your heart as often as possible for a few days. For example, you can put your arm or leg up on a pillow. This will help lessen pain and swelling.
- Protect the wound from injury and sunburn until the skin has had time to heal.
- Don't scratch, rub, or pick at the wound. This can cause the wound to open up and can cause infection.
- Your healthcare provider's instructions will include the type of follow up care you will need. For example:
  - Tape strips are often left on until they fall off on their own. Some tape strips may start to fall off a few days after they are put on. All of the tape strips should fall off by the end of 2 weeks.
  - Skin glue falls off on its own in 5 to 10 days.

- Stitches or staples need to be removed by your healthcare provider in 5 to 14 days, depending on where the wound is located. Some stitches dissolve on their own in 7 to 14 days and don't need to be removed.
- As the wound heals, some swelling, redness, and minor pain are normal.
- Call your healthcare provider if you have:
  - Symptoms of infection, which include new or worse redness, swelling, pain, warmth, or drainage in the area of the wound
  - New bleeding from the wound that won't stop
  - Pain that is increasing or not getting better with pain medicine
  - Fever, chills, nausea, vomiting, or muscle aches
  - Any questions about caring for the wound

Developed by RelayHealth.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*