

Incision Care

Self-care at home

This handout is for patients at the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at UWMC. It explains how to care for your incision after surgery.

Incision Care

- Remove the outermost dressing 48 hours after surgery, before you shower for the first time. Generally, this dressing is gauze and tape.
- Your incision may have strips of white tape called Steri-Strips. If so, leave these in place until they fall off. If they do not fall off on their own, we will remove them during your first follow-up appointment.
- Some drainage from your incision is normal. If you have any drainage from your incisions, or if your clothing rubs against your incisions and causes discomfort, you may cover the area with dry gauze or a panty liner. Otherwise, leave it uncovered.

Sutures



Steri-Strips



Your incision may have sutures or Steri-Strips over it.

Hygiene

- Please wait 48 hours after surgery to take your first shower. After 48 hours, we recommend daily showers to reduce risk of infection.
- Use mild soap and water and wash very gently over your incisions.
- After washing your incision, please pat dry with a clean towel or allow it to air dry.
- Do **not** take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until your incisions are fully healed and no scabs remain. This may take 4 to 6 weeks.

Wound Vac

- In certain situations, your surgeon may decide to place you in a dressing called a wound vac. This is a suction device that promotes healing by holding the incision edges together and drawing fluid out of the wound.
- We will remove the wound vac in clinic after 5 to 7 days. The therapy unit will turn off automatically at 7 days. Please ensure you are charging the machine while in place, for example while sleeping. Do not get this dressing wet. Please read the wound vac unit instructions you were given for more information.
- If your therapy unit sounds an alarm, please contact the supplier at 800.275.4524 immediately.

Stitches

There are many different types of stitches. Some types need to be removed, and some dissolve on their own. If your stitches need to be removed, we will set up a clinic visit for removal 1 to 2 weeks after surgery.



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of this handout.**

When to Contact the Care Team

Check your incision every day. Contact our clinic or your doctor if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing (hold pressure on the site to lessen bleeding)
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and/or chills
- Any signs of infection at your surgical site:
 - Redness
 - Increased swelling
 - Increased pain
 - Bad-smelling drainage
 - Pus or cloudy-colored drainage (white, yellow, or green in color)
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- New rash
- Pain that is worsening and is no longer eased by your pain medicine

If you have redness, swelling, pain, cramping, or warmth in a leg or arm, these may be signs of a blood clot. If you have these symptoms, please go to your local emergency room (ER).

If you have new chest pain or shortness of breath, please call 911.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

During Clinic Hours (Monday through Friday except holidays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.): If you have any questions or concerns, we recommend messaging your surgeon through EPIC MyChart. Please include a photo if needed.

Or you may call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206.598.1217, option 2.

Urgent Needs Outside of Clinic Hours:

If you have an urgent care need after hours, on weekends, or holidays, please call 206.598.6190 and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.