

# How to Care for an Incision and Dressing

## Changing a Regular Dressing Over Your Incision

- Your doctor or nurse will tell you how to take care of your dressings.
  - Wash your hands before starting the dressing change.
  - Remove the old dressing by only touching the edges. Throw away the old dressing in the garbage.
  - Wash your hands again.
  - Open a sterile dressing package by holding the upper two edges of the package and pull sideways, rather than tearing the package open.
  - Keep the new dressing inside the sterile package until you are ready to put it over your incision.
  - Touch only the edges of the new dressing. Do not touch any part of the dressing that will be on the incision.
  - Tape all sides of the dressing securely.
  - Wash your hands when the new dressing is on.
- If there is a drainage tube, be sure to cover this area with the dressing.
- Follow any special instructions your doctor or nurse gives you.

## Taking Care of the Incision Site

The following are general directions. Your doctor or nurse may give you specific directions.

- Wash your hands before caring for your incision.
- Do not apply any creams, salves, ointments or powders unless you have been told to do so.
- You may take a shower. Remove the dressing before your shower. After your shower, pat the incision site dry with a clean towel. Put on a new dressing.
- **Do not take a tub bath until your doctor says it's OK.**
- When you are not in the shower, keep the incision site as clean and dry as possible. (For instance, if the dressing is on your hand or arm, do not wash dishes.)
- Do not poke, scratch or rub your incision.
- Your incision may have some drainage that is clear or slightly bloody. This is normal if the incision continues to drain less each day.
- Protect the incision from sunlight.

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## Special Dressing Change or Incision Care Instructions

- Look at the incision for any signs of infection. If you have any of the following signs, call your doctor:
  - redness
  - swelling
  - unusual drainage
  - warmth around the incision site
  - increased pain or tenderness at the incision
  - incision opens up
  - fever of more than 100.4 F.
- Follow your surgeon's directions for sutures or staples, Steri-Strips<sup>®</sup> or special dressings. If you had:
  - sutures or staples: they will be removed at your follow-up appointment
  - Steri-Strips (thin paper-like strips over the incision): they will begin to fall off as the incision heals. They do not need to be replaced.
- Follow your surgeon's directions for Dermabond<sup>®</sup> (a surgical glue). It will fall off as the incision heals. Do not scratch, rub or pick at the glue.

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