



It is advisable to wear loose and comfortable clothing after surgery. Tight clothing may cause rubbing or pain and increase the risk of the wound edges separating, which will delay healing.

If you or your carer need to inspect your abdominal wound, it is important to make sure that your hands are very clean and that you do not touch the wound itself.

Healing takes time and new tissue is delicate and easily damaged. Try to avoid rubbing your wound. In the early stages of recovery, you should support or splint your abdomen during vomiting, lifting, coughing or sneezing. Heavy lifting and strenuous exercise should be avoided for some weeks after surgery.

Ask your surgeon or clinical nurse specialist what tasks you can undertake while your wound is healing. They should inform you when you can resume activities, such as driving.

How can I best recover at home?

It is important to maintain your overall health as much as possible during your recovery:

- Early gentle movement following surgery will help increase blood flow, oxygen and nutrients to the wound.
- The body needs extra calories when healing as well as plenty of protein, fruit and vegetables, so make sure to eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Staying hydrated by drinking eight glasses a day will help with recovery.
- Ensure you get plenty of sleep, because sleeping aids the healing process.



Reference

WUWHS Consensus Document (2018) Surgical wound dehiscence. Improving prevention and outcomes. London: Wounds International

If you have any concerns please contact

Hospital

Outpatients

Clinical nurse specialist

GP Surgery

To find out whether you have a Leg Club near you, or for any further information about Leg Clubs or the Leg Club model, contact lynn.bullock@legclubfoundation.com www.legclub.org



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Care For Your Wound After Abdominal Surgery



Abdominal surgical healing

Wounds resulting from abdominal surgery can be affected by a number of factors, such as the type of surgery (eg uncomplicated or complicated, short or long procedure, open or keyhole), incision size, the risk of complications (eg infection or perforation), your age and your general health (eg diabetes or obesity).

Abdominal surgical wounds are generally 'directly closed', meaning the edges of the wound are brought back together, positioned and fixed into place at the end of your operation using sutures, staples or occasionally topical tissue adhesives (glue). The wound is usually covered with protective, absorbent dressings that are often waterproof, so you should be able to shower normally soon after surgery.

Your staples or sutures will typically be removed after 7–14 days, after which your wound will continue to heal.

Your recovery will depend upon the type of procedure you have had, your general health, nutritional status and lifestyle choices (eg smoking). Your surgical team should let you know how long your abdominal wound is likely to take to heal.



What to expect after surgery

You will probably have a general anaesthetic for your abdominal surgery. After the anaesthetic wears off, you will feel drowsy and may not remember much about the first few hours after you wake up. A nurse will take your blood pressure regularly, provide painkillers, and encourage you to drink water to stay hydrated. Depending on the type of surgery you have had, you may be given antibiotics.

You will be encouraged to sit up and get out of bed within a day of surgery. Moving is an important part of your recovery.

As part of your post-operative care, you may be prescribed painkillers to ensure your surgical and recovery process is as positive and comfortable as possible.

Make sure that your healthcare professional provides clear guidance to post-operative wound care and how you can aid your recovery at home. This should include advice on gentle exercise, diet, infection prevention and the use of dressings.



What should I watch out for?

In the first 5–7 days following abdominal surgery it is normal for your wound to look slightly red. It may even be a little inflamed or swollen. You will often have bruising after surgery. There will be some pain or discomfort, but this should decrease over time. If you move suddenly or catch the wound on your clothing, you may experience a sudden increase in pain, but this should resolve after a short period of rest.

You should promptly seek advice if:

- The redness and swelling increase
- You experience new, different or severe pain
- The redness starts spreading (cellulitis)
- The skin/area around the wound is firm and painful
- The wound or its fluid starts to smell.

These symptoms may mean that you have an infection. If this is the case, you will require treatment.

You should seek advice if the fluid from your wound:

- Continues or increases after 5 days following your surgery
- Becomes cloudy, green, yellow or brown
- Has an odour.

These changes may indicate a complication has occurred and need to be assessed.

If you feel extremely tired, have lost your appetite, have a high or low temperature, or are experiencing a racing heartbeat or changes to the way you are breathing, seek urgent medical advice.

If you are concerned that something is not right, do not leave the matter until your next regular visit but seek advice right away.

Red flags: Seek urgent medical attention

From your surgical team or GP if:

- Fluid from the wound is leaking outside the dressing
- The area around the wound becomes hot and red
- You are feverish, have the shakes and shivers
- Pain continues or increases

From your nearest A&E department if:

- You have chest pain and shortness of breath
- There is significant bleeding

Looking after yourself and your wound



You should follow the instructions given by your surgical team and keep any follow-up appointments with them and/or your GP, even if you feel fine and think your wound is healing well. They will want to check your progress and your wound. They may also adjust your medications in the weeks after surgery.

Keeping your pain under control is important as it will help you to keep moving, reduce the risk of blood clots and speed up the healing process. Take your pain medication as prescribed by your doctor to prevent 'breakthrough pain', which is harder to manage.