

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF WOUND CARE



When you are helping a family member get ready for planned surgery, or responding to an emergency requiring surgery, you are focused on the surgery itself. But the surgery is not the end of the story. The next phase involves caring for the surgical wound, and even caregivers who were prepared for the surgery often feel unprepared for this task.

This video demonstrates basic steps in caring for a surgical wound, but it is also a general introduction to other kinds of wound care. All the videos in this series stress the importance of having the right supplies on hand, washing hands often and thoroughly, wearing gloves, and disposing of used materials safely.

If the person you are caring for has a different kind of surgical wound—perhaps one with a drain—you should ask your health care professional about specific instructions.

Supplies

To treat a surgical or other wound, these are supplies you will need:

- > Saline spray to clean the wound
- > Dressing ordered by health care professional to cover the wound
 - Silicone dressing is easier to remove because it doesn't stick to the skin
- > Tape or gauze wrap to keep the dressing in place
- > Disposable gloves
- > Towel to place under the person's body to keep the surface clean
- > Zip-lock plastic bags for disposal of treatment materials
 - Do not put used bandages directly in the garbage

Steps in Treatment

1. Wash your hands thoroughly
2. Put on a fresh pair of disposable gloves
3. If there is an old dressing, remove it carefully
4. Place it in the zip-lock plastic bag for disposal
5. Cleanse the wound and pat dry

6. Remove your gloves and place in the disposal bag
7. Wash your hands again
8. Put on a fresh pair of disposable gloves
9. Apply the clean dressing
10. Use tape or gauze wrap to keep the dressing in place
11. Remove your gloves and place in the disposal bag
12. Make sure all materials are in the disposal bag
13. Wash hands again

Signs of Infection

When changing the dressing, make sure you look for any signs of infection. These include:

- > Redness
- > Swelling
- > Change in drainage
- > Fever
- > Chills
- > Increased pain
- > Edges of wound separating

If any of these occur, and especially if you observe more than one, contact your health care professional immediately. Infection following surgery is a serious risk.

Diet to Promote Healing

- > Drinking lots of water is important to keep the skin from drying out
- > To promote healing, the person's diet should include nutritious foods such as
 - Foods rich in protein – lean turkey or chicken
 - Vegetables
 - Whole grains

Other Resources

- > MedlinePlus, a website of the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. National Library of Medicine, has helpful information on [surgical wound care](#). One amusing note: the advice on proper hand washing is: wash your hands for 15 to 30 seconds (the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" or the "Alphabet Song" one time through).
- > WebMD's advice on "[How to Take Care of Your Wound After Surgery](#)" includes advice on limiting activities, getting stitches removed (if the doctor hasn't used the dissolving type), and staying out of the sun while the wound is healing.
- > The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a set of "[Frequently Asked Questions about Surgical Site Infections.](#)" Included are things patients and caregivers can do to prevent infections, such as reminding health care providers to wash their hands.
- > For veterans and caregivers of veterans, go to www.caregiver.va.gov or call 1-855-260-3274 for more information about resources and support.
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