



Gynaecology wound care: information for patients after surgery



With any surgery, there can be a risk of infection, however, most surgical wounds heal up quickly without complications. This leaflet gives you an outline of how to monitor your wound(s) and ask for medical attention, if an infection is suspected.

What are surgical wound infections?

Many micro-organisms (germs) live in and on our bodies and also in our environment. Most germs are harmless. Some are useful, for example the germs in our gut (intestines) help with digestion and also help to protect us from other harmful germs.

Our bodies have natural defences against the organisms that can cause harm. For example, our skin is normally a barrier preventing germs from entering our bodies. A surgical wound infection may occur when germs enter the incision (cut) that your surgeon makes through your skin during an operation.



What are the signs and symptoms of a wound infection?

You may have an infection if you develop one or more of the following symptoms.

- **Swelling and redness**
Swelling is a normal stage of wound healing. However, if you have swelling along with redness and soreness around your wound site, often hot to touch, it may be a warning that your wound is infected.
- **Abnormal oozing from the incision (cut) site**
Your wound may occasionally spot a bit of blood or clear fluid in the first two to three days after your operation, which is normal. If you have an infection, the discharge is thick in consistency, often green or yellow in colour, with a bad smell.
- **Vaginal discharge**
Depending on the type of procedure you have had, it is normal to have a small amount of spotting of blood for a few weeks after your surgery. If the discharge is abnormal, for example, heavy, smelly, or itchy, this may mean you have an infection.
- **Fever**
You may feel generally unwell or have a temperature.

What do I do if I suspect I have an infection or have any concerns about my wound?

You will need to call one of our Gynaecology Assessment Units (GAU) on:

- GAU, **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (QEQM)** Hospital, Margate
Telephone: 01843 23 50 09
Open 24 hours a day; 7 days a week
- GAU, **William Harvey Hospital (WHH)**, Ashford
Telephone: 01233 63 33 31 extension 723-4257
Open Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

Please ring the GAU at the hospital where you received treatment. You will speak to one of the nurses, who will offer you the most appropriate advice.

The GAU is an assessment unit within the ward, which is led by a clinical nurse specialist. It is a service for all our gynaecology patients with concerns following their surgery. It operates by self-referral, on an appointment only basis. This means that you will have to call first to make an appointment with the GAU, **do not just turn up**.

For out of hours concerns, please ring either;

- Birchington Ward, QEQM
Telephone: 01843 23 42 01
Open 24 hours a day; 7 days a week
- Women's Health Suite, WHH
Telephone: 01233 65 19 87
Open 24 hours a day; 7 days a week

What happens if I have a wound infection?

If you have a suspected wound infection the nurse will take some wound or vaginal swabs, depending on your symptoms and the type of operation you have had. These will be sent off to pathology for testing. The results normally take between three to seven days.

The nurse will also collect some blood tests to check your infection markers. Your results from these blood tests will be available later the same day.

In the meantime, you might be started on some antibiotics, which will either be intravenous (IV) (through a cannula), or taken orally (in tablet form); this will depend on how serious your infection is. Observations including checking your blood pressure and temperature will be carried out. A doctor would assess you and make a decision whether to send you home with oral antibiotics, or admit you onto the ward for further treatment and observation. If you are sent home with antibiotics, you might be asked to return to the GAU after a few days to recheck your bloods to see if the antibiotics are working.

How do I look after my wound dressing?

Your wound dressing should remain in place for 48 hours after your procedure; after 48 hours the dressing can be removed. Keeping the dressing on for too long creates unnecessary moisture which may delay wound healing; therefore unless the wound is oozing, keep uncovered to help with quicker wound healing.

Before you remove your dressing, you must wash your hands with soap and water and then carefully take the dressing off. Spare dressings may be provided by your nurse before you leave hospital.

When will my stitches be removed?

A wound can be closed by a range of different materials including stitches (also known as sutures), metal clips/staples, adhesive dressing (glue), or steri-strips.

- **Dissolvable sutures** will usually start to disappear on their own after seven to 10 days, although it may be a few weeks before they disappear completely.

Your nurse will tell you if you have **removable sutures** and make arrangements for their removal, which is usually seven days after your surgery. This can either be by your GP practice nurse or in one of our GAUs.

- **Surgical clips** are usually left for seven to 10 days before they are removed. Arrangements will be made for you to have them removed either by your GP practice nurse or in one of our GAUs.
- Your cut may have been closed using special **medical glue**. This glue must stay in place until your cut has healed, which will take about five to six days. The glue forms part of the scab. Do not pick at it – it will come off gradually by itself.
- **Steri-strips** are small strips which are applied to the skin to help pull the edges of the wound together. This helps to stop any bleeding from the wound. Your nurse will tell you about how long they will need to stay on for. To remove steri-strips you need to soak them in water; this can be done in a shower. Once the steri-strips are wet the adhesive will come unstuck. If the steri-strips do not fall off by themselves, gently pull them to remove them. **Do not get your steri-strips wet until they are due to come off.**

How can I help my wound to heal?

- **Cleaning** - avoid using any detergents such as soap directly on your wound site, particularly before your skin has sealed together. Also avoid touching the area unnecessarily to reduce the risks of an infection.
- **Bathing** - avoid soaking your wound in a bath as that may introduce bacteria to the site. Showers are recommended instead in the first few weeks.
- **Food and drink** - keeping yourself well hydrated (by drinking plenty of water) and having a protein rich diet (such as eggs, milk, beans, sweetcorn, and apricots) can help your wounds heal quicker. Drinking plenty of water will also help with regular bowel movements and reduce the risks of developing blood clots.
- **Sexual activity** - the length of time before you can resume sexual activity will depend upon the type of surgery you have had, but we generally advise you to wait until six weeks after major surgery before having sex again.
- **Housework** - avoid heavy lifting. You will be told by your nurse on discharge how long you will need to do this for, depending on the type of surgery you have had. Usually this will be between two to six weeks.
- **Driving** - when you can start driving again will depend on the type of surgery you have had; this can be discussed with your nurse before you are discharged from hospital. We also advise you to check with your insurance company to make sure that you are covered.
- **Exercise** - keep moving and engage in light activity to help good blood flow around your wound. Do not do any high impact exercise for at least six weeks after surgery.

What if I have any further questions or concerns?

If you have any questions please contact one of the GAUs or wards listed on page 2. Alternatively you can visit your GP surgery as they might be able to help too.

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/patientinformation