

MOHS SURGERY POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Wound Care

Keeping the wound bandaged and moisturized while the sutures are in place is very important for faster healing and a less visible scar. At the time of surgery, we place a pressure dressing. This is to prevent bleeding while you heal in the immediate postoperative period.

1. Keep the bandage dry and intact for 48 hours after surgery.
2. After 48 hours, change the bandage once a day until the sutures are removed. You may soak the bandage in the shower (not the bath) each day to help it peel off more easily.
3. Gently clean the wound with soap and water. Pat the wound dry with a clean cloth. Apply a thin layer of **Vaseline/Aquaphor/Prescription Mupirocin** to the wound.
4. Cover the wound with a large Band-Aid or non-stick gauze (e.g. Telfa®), and your choice of medical tape. Supplies can be purchased at any drug store.
5. Repeat this process daily until sutures are removed.

DO NOT use over the counter antibacterial ointments. These are known to frequently cause allergic reactions in covered surgical wounds. Do not apply rubbing alcohol or hydrogen peroxide directly to the wound. These interfere with wound healing and can cause irritation. Do not submerge the wound in the pool or bathtub until your sutures come out, as this increases the chance of infection.

Sutures

When wounds are sutured, there are usually **2 layers of stitches**. There are dissolvable stitches under the skin and non-dissolvable ones visible on the skin. Non-dissolvable sutures are removed in 1-2 weeks as instructed. Stitches under the skin absorb on their own in 3-6 months. Occasionally, one of the stitches under the skin may work itself through the skin before being absorbed. If this occurs, call the office so we can remove this suture for you.

Dissolvable Sutures

If dissolvable stitches were used on top of the skin, it is normal for the area around the stitches to be pink. The sutures will start to fray after 2-3 weeks. After 3 weeks you can use tweezers and scissors to remove them or rub a dry washcloth over top of the area and they should fall off.

Steri-Strips

If you have steri-strips, all sutures were placed underneath the skin and will dissolve with time. Keep the bandage dry and in place for 48 hours, then you may remove the bulky portion and shower. Leave the steri-strips in place until they fall off on their own. You may shower and let the water run over the tape, but do not scrub. Stitches under the skin absorb on their own in 3-6 months. Occasionally, one of the stitches may work itself through the skin before being absorbed. If this occurs, call our office and we will remove this suture for you.

Bleeding

It is common for the incision to ooze or bleed, especially in the first several hours after surgery. This can be controlled by removing the bandage we applied and then applying **constant direct pressure** to the bleeding site with a clean bandage or paper towel for 20 minutes (without peeking). If the incision continues to bleed after this time, call the office at 731-664-0227. After hours, contact our call center at 731-422-0330.

Swelling

Swelling is common after surgery. Some people are more prone to swelling, and some surgical sites swell more significantly than others (eyes, fingers, legs). Ice and elevation above the heart will help with this. Apply an ice pack over the dressing – on for 20 minutes and off for 1 hour. Repeat until bedtime. You may continue this, if necessary, as long as the swelling persists.

Smoking

To promote better healing and reduce the chance of complications, WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU REFRAIN FROM SMOKING until the sutures are removed. **Why?** Smoking causes constriction of small blood vessels in the skin that are required for good wound healing. Without these blood vessels to provide nutrients to the skin, it will not heal well.

Showering

Unless instructed otherwise, you may resume showering 48 hours after surgery. Do not take a bath or go swimming until the sutures are removed.

Pain Control After Surgery

Pain, redness, and some swelling is normal and expected after a procedure. **This is part of the healing process and represents your body's normal ability to produce inflammation.** Some patients swell more than others, some bleed more than others, and some need more pain control than others. The tools below should help you during your recovery. If you have severe breakthrough pain after trying all of these methods, please call 731-664-0227. After hours, contact our call center at 731-422-0330.

Ice: Apply an ice pack to the bandaged area for 20 minutes, then take it off for 40 minutes. Repeat every hour until you go to bed on the day of surgery and as needed thereafter. Do not apply the ice directly to the wound. Use the ice OVER the bandage. Keep the bandage dry.

Elevate: Keep the surgical site elevated above your heart as much as possible to help with swelling. Use a recliner or pillows to assist you. This is especially important for surgical sites on the legs and arms, which will swell with walking and standing.

Medicine: Take 400mg of Ibuprofen (or 200mg if you have kidney problems) when you get home. 3 hours later, take 500 mg of Tylenol (one Extra strength tab or capsule). 3 hours later, repeat the dose of Ibuprofen. Continue alternating these two medications every 3 hours as needed for pain control. Do not exceed the doses advised above.

DO NOT take alka seltzer, drink alcohol for the first 48 hours after surgery, or apply heat to the wound.

Activity

Resting is a very important part of the healing process. If you move the surgical site frequently, it will be painful, more likely to split open, and more likely to develop track marks. For the first 48 hours, any activity that increases your heart rate increases your risk of problems. Avoid **all** strenuous exercise, bending, lifting, aerobic walking, recreational sports, etc... For the next few weeks, avoid anything that will stress the surgical site. The wound will regain strength slowly over the next few months.

Wound Appearance

Normal:

- There may be swelling or bruising around the wound for 2-3 weeks, especially if near the eyes.
- The suture line may be raised. This is purposeful and will flatten over the next few weeks.
- There may be puckers of skin at the ends of the suture line, especially on hands, arms, and legs. These will blend in 3-4 weeks.

Abnormal:

- If the wound becomes increasingly red, warm, and painful after 3-4 days, has purulent drainage, or if you develop fever or chills, please call our office.

Any time a skin cancer is removed, there is a scar. The scar may remain pink for months and the area may remain numb for weeks to months following surgery. Over time, the redness should fade, and the scar should soften and blend more evenly with the surrounding skin. If you have any questions during the healing process, please contact our office. It takes 1 year for the scar to remodel and heal completely.

More Information

If you'd like more information or prefer a video instruction, you can watch the American College of Mohs Surgery video about post-operative care using the link below. Scan the QR code with your smartphone camera and click the YouTube link to view the video. Make sure your phone speaker is on.

