

# Following spinal implant procedures

Vital wound care information



## **How do I care for my wounds?**

Your wound will be covered by a dressing put on at the end of surgery. Keep this clean and dry for the first 48 hours following your operation. If the dressing needs to be changed in the first 48 hours (because blood or fluid from the wound has soaked through), this should be done at the pain clinic or your GP practice where sterile gloves will be used to reduce the risk of your wound becoming infected.

After 48 hours, if your dressing needs to be changed (for example, if it has become wet and is no longer sticking properly), you may put a replacement dressing on at home. Before you remove the old dressing, wash your hands with soap and water. Do not touch the inside of the new dressing and try not to touch the wound with your fingers.

## **When can I have a shower or bath?**

Following your operation, wait at least 48 hours before having a shower. Your dressing will be waterproof and should be left on whilst you shower. Minimise the amount of water allowed on the dressing. If your dressing comes off, allow the wound to air dry before putting on a clean dressing. Do not immerse the wound in a bath for at least three weeks after your surgery.

## **How long should I leave the dressing on for?**

Dressings are normally kept on for 5 to 7 days after surgery.

## **When should I get my wound checked?**

We will arrange for you to come back to the pain clinic, normally about 7 days after your surgery to have your wounds checked. If you have non dissolvable stitches, these may be taken out at this point. Dissolvable stitches normally take up to 3 weeks to disappear.

## **What is a surgical site infection?**

Most surgical wounds heal up rapidly without complications, but about 5% of spinal cord implants become infected. This means that germs enter the cut your doctor has made through your skin to carry out the operation.

These germs can then cause an infection to develop which can potentially cause serious problems. Infections around the spine are known to cause permanent nerve damage and paralysis if left untreated.

## **What precautions are taken to try to prevent surgical site infections?**

Your doctors take a number of precautions to minimise the risk of infection. For example, at the beginning of your operation you will have received antibiotics through the drip in your arm. Before your operation, we also ask you to wash with a special antiseptic solution (Chlorhexidine) to help prevent germs on the skin infecting your wounds. However, whilst every care is taken it is still possible for an infection to develop.

## **How will I know if my wound becomes infected?**

A wound infection can develop at any time from two to three days after surgery until the wound has healed (usually two to three weeks after the operation). Very occasionally, an infection can occur several months after an operation.

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

- the skin around your wound gets red or sore and you do not think that it is part of the normal wound healing process, or it feels hot and swollen
- your wound has a green or yellow coloured discharge (pus)
- you feel generally unwell, feverish, or you have a temperature.

## **What happens if I develop these symptoms?**

Contact the pain clinic as soon as possible for further advice. If you are unable to contact the pain clinic (at the weekend for example), seek advice from your GP. A sample (swab) from the surface of the wound is usually taken and if your doctor thinks your wound is infected, antibiotics are usually given. If the infection is serious, you may need further surgery to remove the spinal cord implant altogether.

## **Is there anything else I can do to reduce the risk of infection?**

Following your operation, eating and drinking properly are important as your body needs energy and nutrients to heal quickly. If you have diabetes, it's important to take care that your blood sugar is well controlled. If you smoke, this can slow the wound healing process and may make you more prone to infections.

## **Contact us**

If you have any further questions, please contact the Pain Clinic secretaries on:  
**01872 252160 / 252792**

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on  
**01872 252690**

