

Surgical Incisions

Key Points

- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before caring for the incision.
- Do not peek under the bandage or remove the surgery bandage until directed by your health care provider.

This information will help you and your family care for your incision once you return home. This should only be used as a reference guide; your health care provider's instructions should always be followed first.

Call Telehealth Nursing ([651-229-3890](tel:651-229-3890)) if:

- You have any signs of infection
- The incision pulls apart or opens up

Signs of Infection

An incision that's healing might look pink. It should not be inflamed or deep red. Be sure to watch for any signs of infection, including:

- Redness, swelling or drainage
- Heat or warmth at the incision site
- Tender, enlarged lymph nodes in an armpit or the groin area
- An ongoing fever

If your incision is covered by a cast, you need to make sure you're not experiencing any of the following:

- Drainage seeping through the cast
- Pain at the incision site under the cast
- Foul odor coming from the cast
- Increase or decrease in warmth from under the cast

Bandages

- If your bandages become dirty or wet during the first 48 hours after surgery, call Telehealth Nursing ([651-229-3890](tel:651-229-3890)).
- Bandages covering the incision must be left on as directed by your health care provider.

- The Steri-Strip bandages will peel off and eventually come off your skin. If these start to pull up from the edges, trim the edges off. If the Steri-Strip comes off and the incision looks like it still needs to heal, put on a new Steri-Strip. They can be found at a drug store.

Water

- Shower: You may take a shower three days after your surgery. Remove the dressing on your incision(s) before you shower. Replace it afterward if your health care provider has told you to keep your dressing on for more than three days after surgery.
- Tub bath: Don't take a tub bath while you have an open surgical incision. Wait until at least 14 days after your surgery, or until your doctor says it's alright.
- Sponge bath: You may take a sponge bath. But while washing yourself, make sure to keep your incision(s) dry.
- Swimming/water bodies: Avoid any body of water (including pools, hot tubs, whirlpools, oceans, rivers and lakes) for 30 days after your surgery, or until your doctor says it's alright.

Scarring

To reduce scarring:

- Try not to expose your incision to the sun for a year. If you can't avoid the sun, wear a white T-shirt and use sunscreen.
- Use vitamin E oil on the scar when your provider says it's alright to do.
- Eat fresh fruits and vegetables and whole-grain breads. Increase intake of vitamin C and protein. Drink plenty of water and juices. Good nutrition is necessary for healing.

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This information is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care providers. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or others on your health care team.

If you are a Gillette patient with urgent questions or concerns, please contact Telehealth Nursing at [651-229-3890](#).