

## Care & Removal of Stitches or Staples

### Patient information - Department of Surgery

#### Advice for patient's who are discharged with stitches (also called sutures) or staples (also called clips)

##### Stitches/sutures

There are two main types of stitches:

Dissolvable *and* Non-dissolvable.

Your nurse will advise you which type of stitches you have.

- **Dissolvable Stitches** (do not need to be removed)

These cannot normally be seen, except for a piece at each end of the stitch/suture line.

Where ends need trimming, you may require an appointment with your GP or Outpatient Department to get this done. Occasionally these stitches do not dissolve and need to be removed, if you can still see or feel them more than 2 weeks post surgery, see your GP or Outpatient Department.

Your nurse will advise you if this is necessary.

- **Non-dissolving Stitches** (need to be removed on time - see 'Removal of Stitches' below.) These stitches can be seen and are usually blue or black in colour.

- **Staples/clips**

Ensure that your nurse provides you with a staple remover to take with you to your GP or district nurse, if they will be removing your staples.



##### Removal of Stitches/Staples

Stitches/Staples will need to be removed as per your doctor's instructions, which for you is in ..... days, on .....(date), by: (tick one of the following)

- Hagley Outpatients    Plastic Outpatients    Orthopaedic Outpatients  
 General Practitioner's Nurse    District Nurse

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## Directions for care of stitches/staples

It is alright to shower after 24 hours, unless you have been told other-wise. Baths should be avoided, as the stitch/staple line may become too moist.

1. If the stitch/staple line is exposed (has no cover): The stitches/staples should be dry; they may have crusts (**Remember: DO NOT** remove the scabs as they protect the new skin. They will fall off themselves.)
2. Pat the stitch/staple line dry with a clean towel after showering.
  - **Do not** shave the stitch line until it is healed and the stitches are removed.
  - **Do not** apply make-up, lotions, or perfume to the stitch/staple line until it is healed and the sutures/staples are removed.
  - Apply chlorsig ointment to suture line up to three times a day or as per your surgeon's instructions (especially if suture line is on the face and uncovered). You should be sent home with the ointment or a prescription for it.
3. If the stitch/staple line is covered with tape (called Mefix):
  - This can stay in place until your GP or Outpatient appointment and you can shower with it. Just replace it if it falls off.
  - If ooze comes through the tape over the stitches/staples, place a piece of gauze over the tape and tape the gauze in position.
  - If the stitch/staple line is bleeding, **apply pressure** by placing gauze or a clean face flannel over the stitch tape and press firmly for 10 minutes. **If it does not stop bleeding, contact your GP or Plastics Outpatient Department Mon-Fri and Public Holidays (excluding Christmas Day) 8:00am-4:30pm (Emergency Dept after hours)**
4. If the stitch/staple line has a dressing **or** bandage in addition to Mefix:
  - Keep the dressing/bandages dry.
  - If the dressing/bandage gets wet or falls off, you should seek advice from your GP or Plastics Outpatient Department. The stitch line may still require the support of a bandage.

## Signs of Infection

If your wound or stitches/staples has any of the following, you are advised to contact your GP as soon as possible:

- Unusual or increase in redness, swelling, or tenderness.
- Drainage persists from the stitch line (more than a small amount of blood or yellow/green stained fluid).
- Pain that increases and is not relieved by pain medication.
- White pimples or blisters around the stitch line and /or an offensive odour.
- If you experience a temperature/fever (hot and/or cold) or feel unwell like you have the flu.

**Protect from Sun:** Avoid exposing the stitch line to the sun, but if you are out in the sun apply a high SPF sunscreen & protect area with clothing or head wear.

## Once the stitches/staples are removed

- Stabilise the scar with mefix tape or any tape that your surgeon/nurse suggests for six months, to help prevent it becoming raised and bumpy.
- If the scar does become red, raised and bumpy or you are worried about it in any way, let your surgeon know at your outpatient clinic and they can send a referral through to the scar therapist at Christchurch Hospital.