

Wound Care for Surgical Specialties

Read this handout to learn how to care for your wound. There are many benefits to cleaning your wound. By cleaning your wound, you are lowering the risk of infection and helping speed up wound healing.

How to Clean Your Wound

1. Gather dressings, clean washcloths or gauze, and non-scented liquid soap.
2. Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 30 seconds and dry.
3. Gently remove the wound dressing from your skin/body. If dressing is stuck, apply warm water with cloth over dressing to help loosen it. **Do not** soak dressing in tub.
4. Wash your hands again.
5. Clean the skin around your open wound with antibacterial soap and warm water.
6. Wash your wound with the ordered soap and water and a washcloth or gauze. Use gentle pressure with circular motions going over the wound several times to clean the area. It is okay if the wound bleeds during this part and if loose scabs come off.
7. Rinse off all soap.
8. Use clean towel or gauze to pat dry.
9. Apply new dressing as ordered.

Activity Restrictions

Until your wound heals, **avoid**:

- Swimming, hot tubs, and soaking the wound in a bath (gentle showers are okay)
- Going in lakes and ponds
- Too much stretching or exercising of the wound and areas close to the wound
- Exposing the wound to dust or dirt

When to Call

Call the clinic if you notice any of these symptoms:

- Redness around the wound
- Warmth around your wound that is warmer than the rest of your skin
- Increased swelling
- Increased pain
- Fever over 100.4°F
- Chills
- Thick, smelly drainage that is yellow or green

Who to Call

If you have questions, please contact your referring provider through MyChart or call your referring provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan.

For a list of UW Health Clinics, visit

www.uwhealth.org/.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 3/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8487