

Dr. Rick Wilcox

Coogee Skin Cancer Clinic

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WOUND CARE

Latest research has shown that wounds heal better when they have been covered with a dry dressing. The dry dressing becomes damp with the body's natural humidity (which is sterile). This damp dressing is the best medium for new skin cell growth.

So whether the wound is a surgical scar with stitches, or a biopsy punch hole, or a curette site (which is probably a 10-20 piece sized gravel rash style lesion) it will heal best if it is kept covered. We like to keep it covered for at least the first four days. We prefer to have the wounds covered longer; until the stitches come out from a surgical scar, or for at least 7-10 days for a curette site.

Post op bleeding

Sometimes the wounds bleed for the first 24-48 hours. Often the bleeding may start 5-6 hrs after the procedure when the anaesthetic has worn off. The anaesthetic has adrenaline in it, which constricts blood vessels. It makes the wound site look blanched. It helps to decrease bleeding during the procedure. When the anaesthetic (and adrenaline) wear off, after about 5-6 hours, there can be a rebound vasodilation. The blood vessels open up and a previously dry wound starts to bleed. If this happens don't panic. The treatment is pressure and elevation. Elevate the wound if it is on a limb to at, or above, heart level. If the wound is on your head, sit up, push on the wound firmly with some gauze or bandages (you can use a sanitary napkin if there are some in the house). You will need to apply constant firm pressure for about 10-15 minutes. Binding the limb, or your head with a firm bandage will help stop the bleeding. If the bleeding won't stop with this basic first aid treatment ring or come into the surgery. If it is after hours or the weekend go to casualty.

Post op pain

When the anaesthetic has worn off most people don't experience much pain. If the wound is sore, take panadol, 2 every 4 hours as required (people only rarely need to take panadol).

Keep the dry dressing (which has become damp or moist underneath) on for at least 4 days. You may change it if it has become too blood soaked or gory after the 1st 24-48 hrs but we would prefer it if you didn't. When you change the dressing you can clean the wound with savlon lotion or saline. Don't use betadine- it's great for killing

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bugs but it almost works too well. The Betadine will also kill the fibroblasts-the cells which are laying down new skin. It is a bad thing to kill fibroblasts – we like them. New cells often coat the wound (particularly a wet wound like the ‘gravel rash’ scar of a curette) with a yellowy film. This isn’t pus. Don’t scrub it off. It is the fragile new cells re-epitheliasing . If you leave the wound uncovered this new epithelium dries out and forms a scab or a crust. This is a bad thing. Scabs and crusting slow down wound healing.

So re-capping, use a dry dressing on the wound for at least 4 days, preferably longer. This dressing becomes moist and should be occlusive to stop crusting or scabbing. Don’t worry if there is a yellow film when you change the dressing; this is new skin growing, not an infection. Signs of infection are pain/throbbing/swelling. So if the wound becomes red, hot and tender, or if there is any redness or streaking radiating out from the wound, or a swollen/tender lymph node up stream the wound could be infected. Don’t panic, it will settle with antibiotics. Ring or come into the surgery or go to casualty if it is afterhours.