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Laceration – sutures or staples – at home

A laceration is a cut that goes all the way through the skin. The cut can be small and cared for at home. Or the cut can be large and need medical attention right away.

If the cut is large, it may need stitches or staples to close the wound and stop the bleeding.

It is important to take care of the injury site after the doctor applies the stitches. This helps prevent infection and allows the wound to heal properly.

How to care for stitches (sutures)

Stitches are special threads that are sewn through the skin at an injury site to bring a wound together. Care for your stitches and wound as follows:

- Keep the area dry for the first 48 hours after stitches have been placed.
- Gently wash around the site with cool water and soap. Clean as close to the stitches as you can. Avoid washing or rubbing the stitches directly.
- Dry the site with a clean paper towel. Avoid using the towel directly on the stitches.
- If there was a bandage over the stitches, replace it with a new clean bandage.
- After 3 days, remove the bandage unless the doctor or nurse told you otherwise. Allow the wound to be exposed to the open air.
- Keep the site clean and dry by washing it 1 to 2 times daily.
- See your doctor when it is time to remove the stitches. Your doctor should advise you about when to come back to get the stitches removed. If not, contact your doctor.

How to care for staples

Medical staples are made of special metal and are not the same as office staples. Care for your staples and wound as follows:

- Keep the area completely dry for 48 hours after staples are placed.
- You can wash the area around the staple site after 48 hours. Use soap and water.
- Dry the area completely, dabbing around the staples.
- Keep the area open to air. There is no need to place a bandage over your staples.
- Clean the area around the staples daily.
- Return to your doctor when it is time to remove the staples. Your doctor should advise you about when to come back to get the staples removed. If not, contact your doctor.

Important tips

- Prevent the wound from re-opening by keeping activity to a minimum.
- Make sure your hands are clean when you care for the wound.
- If the laceration is on your scalp, it is OK to shampoo and wash. Be gentle and avoid excessive exposure to water.
- Take proper care of your wound to prevent further scarring.
- Call your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about how to care for stitches or staples at home.
- You can take pain medicine, such as ibuprofen, as directed for pain at the wound site.
- Follow-up with your doctor to make sure the wound is healing properly.

When to call the doctor

Call your doctor right away if:

- There is any redness, pain, or yellow pus around the injury. This could mean there is an infection.
- There is bleeding at the injury site that will not stop after 10 minutes of direct pressure.
- You have a fever greater than 100oF.

- There is pain at the site that will not go away, even after taking pain medicine.
- If the wound has split open.
- If your stitches or staples have come out too soon.

References

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