Aftercare and Recovery

For patients who have had a procedure with us. What to expect, how to care for your wound, and when to contact us.

> **FOR PATIENTS WHO HAVE HAD SURGERY WITH US**
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> This page is for people who have already had a procedure at The Skin Cancer Institute. It repeats the advice given to you on the day, so you have it to hand at home.
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> If you have not yet had surgery and are looking for what a procedure involves, see our treatment pages.

Most people recover from a procedure of this kind without difficulty. The advice below is what we would tell you in clinic, written down so you can return to it over the next week or so.

What should I expect in the first few hours?

You have had a procedure under local anaesthetic. The numbness usually wears off within one to four hours, and some tenderness afterwards is entirely normal.

If you are uncomfortable, paracetamol or your usual pain relief is fine. Please avoid aspirin, unless it has been prescribed for another condition, in which case carry on taking it as normal. As always, follow the instructions on the packaging.

If you stopped an anticoagulant for the procedure, please start taking it again straight away, unless you have been told otherwise.

For the first 24 hours, or until you feel fully yourself again, please do not drive, cycle, drink alcohol or operate machinery.

If you are elderly, in poor health, or have had a more extensive procedure, it is sensible to have someone with you overnight.

How do I look after the wound?

Keep the dressing in place for five days. It is showerproof, so you can shower as normal, and there is a spare dressing in your pack if you would like to cover the area again afterwards.

Please avoid soaking the wound in a bath until it has healed fully. If Steri-Strip (butterfly) dressings were used, these come off at your dressing clinic appointment seven days after surgery — there is no need to remove them yourself.

While the wound is healing, avoid exercise and anything strenuous that would pull on the wound or the stitches. A week of taking it gently makes a real difference to how the scar settles.

Is the advice different depending on where I had surgery?

Yes, slightly. The principle is the same — keep the area still and, where you can, raised.

Head and neck

- Sleep with extra pillows.
- Avoid straining, heavy lifting and exercise for 5 to 7 days.
- Avoid bending forwards.

Hand and arm

- Avoid heavy lifting and exercise for 5 to 7 days.
- Keep the arm raised above heart level for 5 to 7 days, using a sling.

Foot and leg

- Keep the leg raised above waist level for 5 to 7 days, as often as you can — raise the foot while sitting.
- Avoid long walks and extended standing.

What if the wound bleeds?

A little bleeding is common and not a cause for alarm, particularly if you take certain medicines or if the area has been knocked.

Place a piece of gauze over the wound and press firmly and continuously for 10 to 20 minutes. Use a clock — twenty minutes is longer than it feels, and lifting the gauze to check interrupts the process. Once the bleeding has stopped, cover the original dressing with a clean one.

> **WHEN TO CONTACT US STRAIGHT AWAY**
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> If bleeding is heavy and has not settled after 20 minutes of continuous pressure, or if it is getting worse, call us on 020 3514 2995.
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> If it continues despite pressure and we are closed, please go to your nearest Emergency Department.
>
> Do let us know afterwards, so we can update your surgeon and arrange anything further you may need.

For anything else after the first 24 hours, please call us, or get in touch through the Patient Portal or the website. We would always rather hear from you than have you wonder.

What happens at the dressing clinic appointment?

You will come back to a dressing clinic about a week after surgery so we can check the wound and change the dressing. Your surgeon decides how many appointments you need, and will tell you on the day. However many you need, they are included in the cost of your procedure.

You will be sent a booking link after your procedure.

If your stitches are being removed, we suggest taking simple pain relief such as paracetamol beforehand. Removal is quick, but it can be a little uncomfortable.

What are the signs of infection?

Wound infections are uncommon, but it is worth knowing what to look for. Contact us if you notice pain that is increasing rather than settling, redness spreading outwards from the wound, swelling that is getting worse, discharge or an unpleasant smell, or if you feel feverish or generally unwell.

None of these is an emergency, but they are all worth a telephone call. Infections treated early are straightforward.

When can I get back to normal?

Most people pick up their normal routine quickly. The wound, rather than the clock, is what to go by.

- Work — as soon as you feel comfortable, which for most people is the next day. If you have had a larger procedure with a flap or a graft, a week or two may be more realistic, particularly if your work is physical.
- Driving — not for the first 24 hours. After that, wait until you feel comfortable and can move freely.
- Exercise and the gym — avoid anything strenuous while the wound is healing. For most people that is the first week, and longer if the advice above for your part of the body says so.
- Swimming — not until the wound has healed fully, as swimming means soaking it.
- Baths — the same. Showering is fine from the start, as your dressing is showerproof.

If you are unsure whether something is safe yet, please ask us. We would rather answer than have you guess.

What about scarring?

Any surgical removal leaves a mark. How noticeable it is depends on the size and site of the lesion, how the wound was closed and how your own skin heals; your surgeon will have discussed what to expect before your procedure. Scars settle over many months, and keeping the area out of strong sun while they do so helps.

When will I have my results?

If a sample was taken during your procedure, results are usually available within one week. Occasionally further testing or a second specialist opinion is needed, which takes a little longer — this is routine and not a sign that anything is wrong.

You will either receive your results by letter, or be invited in to discuss them.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS

Telephone · 020 3514 2995, 9am to 5pm

If you reach voicemail, leave your name and a number and we will call you back.

You can also reach us through the Patient Portal or the website.

No question is too small — if something is worrying you, please ask.