

Maxillofacial Unit

Care following your minor operation

Name: _____

Hospital number: V _____

Important information

After surgery has been performed on the head or neck area, please ensure you:

- keep the head/neck/facial wound and dressings **dry** and **clean** for 72 hours
- do not bend down for at least 24 - 48 hours and avoid vigorous exercise
- avoid drinking alcohol 24 hours before or after surgery
- avoid smoking and smoky atmospheres until your wound has healed

Will I be in any discomfort afterwards?

During the next 24 hours, there may be some discomfort once the local anaesthetic has worn off. This can be relieved by taking some painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen. Avoid ibuprofen if you are allergic to aspirin. When taking medicines it is important to read and follow the instructions, warnings and dosage on the packet or bottle. If you are prescribed antibiotics, complete the course. **Note:** Female patients taking antibiotics should be aware that these can interfere with the effectiveness of the contraceptive pill and other contraceptive methods should be considered.

Some tenderness and pain is expected after the surgery. If you notice swelling, any redness, or you have excessive pain and leakage from the wound, this may indicate a wound infection. Contact your GP or the maxillofacial unit for advice.

What should I do if there is bleeding?

If any bleeding occurs, apply continuous firm pressure with a clean pad directly on the wound for 10 minutes. Repeat as necessary. This often occurs as the local anaesthetic wears off. If the bleeding continues or is excessive, seek medical advice.

Looking after your dressings

- Keep dressings clean, dry and in place for 72 hours. Thereafter, bathe the dressing in warm salty water twice daily and continue once dressing comes away (don't pull the dressing off).
- You may shower but keep the wound area and dressing, if any, covered or protected for the first few days.

- If dressings become wet or dirty, you may remove and replace them but don't pull them off. Contact your GP or the maxillofacial unit for advice.
- Do not remove any white strips that may be directly over the wound (if these are paper stitches they may come away themselves).

Caring for your stitches

If you have had stitches in your wound advice will be given to you and an outpatient appointment will be agreed with you. You may be asked to return to your GP practice to see the practice nurse for the stitches to be removed.

Stitches in the head and neck area are normally removed after five to seven days. On the scalp, they may be removed up to two weeks later. Stitches in other areas of the body may also remain in place for longer.

Dissolving stitches are known as **dissolvable sutures**. They do not need to be removed. If the stitches are buried under the skin, they do not require any action. Some stitches are on the surface of the wound. After a week they can be washed and moisturised which will help them dislodge.

Instructions for 'shave' only

Keep the dressing clean and dry for four to five days. Instructions will be given to you to remove the tape. The dressing underneath may stick to the wound. If this happens splash the dressing with water, it should become jelly-like and peel off.

A scab will form. The scab must be left intact.

Once the wound is completely healed, try to massage or moisturise the scar frequently with a light un-perfumed cream.

Will I have a scar?

Any operation performed will leave a permanent scar. Initially, the scar may look red, slightly lumpy and raised.

Regular massage to the scar using circular movements with an un-perfumed moisturising cream will help improve the scar appearance.

The scar may take one to two years to soften and fade. Sensible sun protection measures should be taken, as newly healed wounds and scars can burn more easily.

Infection can cause a wound to re-open; this may lead to problems with scar formation such as stretching or thickening.

Some people and certain areas of the body may be prone to the development of hypertrophic or keloid scars which are raised, itchy and red. If you have any concerns about your scar, contact your GP who may refer you back to the hospital.

People heal at different rates, so do not worry if you think your recovery is much slower than you expected. Take into consideration your current medical health, your diet and whether you smoke, as these factors can all affect the rate at which your wounds heal.

Follow-up appointments

Please return to:

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GP surgery, practice nurse

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Maxillofacial Unit - QVH

For removal of stitches on:

Your next outpatient appointment will be:

Further questions

Should you have any concerns or questions please contact your GP or practice nurse.

If you have any concerns, questions or worries before your outpatient clinic appointment, please contact

Switchboard

Tel: 01342 414000

and ask for the maxillofacial unit - our usual opening times are Monday to Friday 8.30am–5pm. For emergencies out of hours, please ask for the maxillofacial doctor on call.

Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or an alternative format.