

Sutures Care Advice

What are sutures (stitches)?

Sutures, also called stitches, are made from materials like silk or man-made fibres like nylon. They hold the skin together until it heals itself and are then removed.

The following advice should help you to recover.

Should I keep the stitches covered?	This depends on the location of the wound. Usually we do not put dressings over wounds on the face or head, especially if they are clean and dry. Try not to disturb your dressing, but if the top layer becomes dirty or loose, you will need to replace it – your practice nurse can do this.
Can I get the stitches wet?	You should try to keep them clean and dry. The skin will not heal properly if it keeps getting wet. Dab your stitches dry with a clean towel after washing, even if the wound area did not get wet, to ensure the area is completely dry. If your stitches get wet accidentally, simply dry the area immediately with a clean towel and make sure all the moisture around the stitches is soaked up.
Can I go to work?	That depends on what your job is and where the stitches are. If they are in a place where working may damage them, then it is better to stay off work until the wound has healed. If you handle food at work, then you should not work until your wound is completely healed.
When will my stitches be removed?	The amount of time that the stitches stay in will depend on where the cut is and the type of suture (thread) used. We will have told you how long this should be on the chart (see over). It is important that you do not exceed this time as the stitches may begin to irritate the skin if they are left in too long and cause infection. Never attempt to remove the stitches yourself.

Who will remove my stitches?	Your GP practice nurse/local MIU and we would recommend you make an appointment in advance.
What if the stitches burst?	If at any time you are concerned that the wound has reopened, please return to us or your nearest Emergency Department /MIU – see below for contact telephone numbers. It is important not to scratch your stitches; even though they are strong, scratching may damage them.
Will I have a scar?	This will depend on the size and position of the wound. Healed cuts are always red and obvious at first but generally fade with time. You will probably be left with a mark but this is impossible to predict. If you can keep your stitches clean, dry and untouched, then there will be less chance of infection occurring and less chance of an obvious scar.
Can I go swimming?	You should also not go swimming until your wound has healed and your stitches have been removed.
When should I seek advice?	The wound may ooze slightly at first – this is natural. However, if the discharge increases or becomes foul-smelling, or if there is increased irritation, heat, swelling, redness, pain, around the wound or feeling unwell with a temperature (shivers or shakes) above 38°C you should either see your GP (or go back to the ED where you were seen) as this may indicate an infection is developing.
Can I play sport?	You should avoid contact sports, such as football or hockey, to give your wound the best possible chance to heal. Children may also be advised to avoid PE at school until their wound has healed.
Can my child play as usual?	If your child has stitches, do not let them play with water, mud, sand and paint. Playing with things like these could cause the wound area to get dirty or sore, or cause an infection.

Special sites / stitches:

Some stitches can be absorbed by the body and do not need to be removed. These are usually only used internally or inside the mouth – you will be told if these have been used on you.

Scalp wounds only

Wash your hair with mild shampoo as soon as possible after treatment and then not again until after the stitches have been removed.
Dry your hair gently and do not comb over that area.

Do not put any make-up or cream onto the wound while the stitches are in place.

After the wound has healed you should protect the area from the sun by using sun block for 6–12 months

The list below is a guide to the advised removal time for your stitches

Head/Scalp	7 days
Face	5 days
Arms / legs / Hands / fingers	7 – 10 days
Over joints	10 – 14 days
Back	10 – 14 days
Any other are of the body	7 – 10 days

If you are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 10 days, we advise you to contact your GP or return to the Emergency Department/MIU department where you were seen.

If you are at all concerned about your injury please contact the relevant Emergency Department/Minor Injury Unit (MIU):

Royal Gwent Hospital (RGH): 01633 234056

Nevill Hall Hospital (NHH): 01873 732073

Grange University Hospital (GUH): 01633 493287

Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU: 01443 802353

Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318

References:

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/accidents-first-aid-and-treatments/how-should-i-care-for-my-stitches/>

“This document is available in Welsh / Mae’r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.