



## Advice following skin surgery – special situations

### Bolster dressing

- You have a bolster dressing, which means the dressing has been stitched down to keep it in place.
- The bolster may comprise of gauze, sponge or Aquaplast – a mouldable plastic dressing.
- It is common for antibiotic ointment to seep from the edges – gently wipe this away.
- If there is bleeding, apply pressure over the bolster for 15 minutes.
- After 24 hours, gently clean around bolster with a cotton-tipped bud soaked in warm water twice daily to remove any scabs. Pat dry afterwards and repeat daily. Keep the edges moist by dabbing Vaseline after cleaning.
- Keep the bolster dressing clean and dry.
- The bolster dressing and stitches will be removed in (in few days). Expect the graft to appear mottled or purple and depressed. This is normal.

### Cold compresses

- Apply a cold compress over the steristrips (up to) 10 minutes three times a day.
- This may either be a towel soaked in cold water (and left in the fridge to cool further) or a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel.
- Continue this for 2 weeks.

### Secondary intention healing

- The wound has been left open for the body heal. This is known as healing by secondary intention.
- Wounds take 1 to 2 months to heal completely by secondary intention, but your body does a fantastic job at this process.
- You will be asked to see your practice nurse at the GP surgery or return to the Dermatology department for the first change of dressings in 3 to 7 days.
- Following this, the wound needs to be redressed every (few) days as below. This can be carried out by yourself, a carer or by the practice nurse at the GP surgery:
- Gently remove the old dressing.
- Clean the wound gently using a cotton-tipped bud dipped in tap water to lift any dried blood or excess crusting on or around the wound. As the wound heals, you can shower over it.
- After cleaning, apply a thin coating of Vaseline to the wound with a cotton-tipped bud, then the dress in the following order:

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## Split thickness skin graft – donor site

- A thin sheet of skin has been shaved off from the donor site. The wound is like a graze and has been covered with a padded dressing, which should be left for 14 days. The dressing will become stiff and dry out as the wound heals.
- Keep this dressing clean and dry.
- It is best to avoid disturbing the dressing, even if there is a lot of ooze, and better to reinforce it with more gauze and tape if necessary.
- If the dressing is very soiled, the outer dressing can be changed. It is very important not to disturb the dressing in direct contact with the skin for 14 days as this may damage the healing skin.
- In 14 days, remove the dressing preferably by soaking it off in the shower.

## Split thickness skin graft – on the lower leg

- A bulky bandage is applied following surgery which should remain on for one week.
- A lighter dressing can be applied thereafter.
- It often takes between 2 to 4 weeks for a graft on the lower leg to completely heal, and you may need twice weekly dressing changes until then.

## Contact details

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