

# Caring for an Open Surgical Drain (Penrose Drain)



You've had surgery. You now have a temporary tube (drain) placed in the surgical site. The tube removes extra blood or other fluids that may collect at the site. This helps to prevent infection as you heal.

You have a type of drain called an open surgical drain (Penrose drain). This is a flat, soft tube. Part of the tube is inside your body. The other end of the tube goes outside your body. There is a dressing (gauze bandage) around this end of the tube. This collects any blood or fluid that comes out. There may be a small safety pin on the end of the drain. This stops the tube from sliding down into your wound.

You'll need to change the dressing at home as often as your healthcare provider tells you to. Always follow your provider's specific instructions. You'll also need to take notes about the color of the drained fluid, how much fluid is on the dressing, and if there's a bad smell. As your incision heals, there will be less fluid on the dressing.

Follow these steps below to change your dressing.

## Supplies

Have these items ready before you start:

- Nonsterile gloves
- Soap
- Clean washcloth
- 2 sterile 4-inch-by-4-inch gauze pads
- Clean scissors (if needed to cut the gauze pads)
- Paper tape

## Changing your dressing

### 1. Remove the dressing

- Wash your hands with soap and clean, running water. Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Carefully take off the dressing. Look at the color and the amount of drainage on the dressing. Also notice if it has a bad smell. Throw the dressing away. When you are done removing the dressing, write down the date and time and any details about the color and amount of fluid, and any bad smell.
- Look around the drain insertion site. Call your provider's office if you have any swelling, soreness, a bad odor, or pus. This could be a sign of infection.

### 2. Clean the site

- Wash your hands again with soap and clean, running water.
- Put on the nonsterile gloves.
- Clean around and under your drain using the clean washcloth, soap, and water. Be careful not to pull the drain out, or for water to go into your wound.

### 3. Put on the new dressing

- The 4-inch-by-4-inch gauze pad should have a cut in it. If it doesn't, make a cut in the pad using the clean scissors. Cut in the middle of 1 side of the pad. Cut until you reach the center of the pad.
- Place the cut gauze pad under and around the drain.
- Place the second, uncut gauze pad on top of the drain.
- Tape the edge of the dressings to keep them in place.
- Take off your gloves and throw them away.
- Wash your hands with soap and clean, running water.

## When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Signs of infection, such as:
  - Redness, pain, or swelling near the drain
  - Cloudy fluid coming out of the drain
  - A fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as advised by your provider
- The fluid coming out of the drain is bad-smelling, thick, or green or white
- Bleeding at the drain site
- If the drain comes out or gets pulled

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