

Incision Care: Chest



Dressing your incision helps keep it clean, dry, and free of infection. That way, it will heal faster. Your incision may be open to the air by the time you go home. But if you need to change your dressing, follow the steps below.

Step 1. Wash your hands and set up

- Wet your hands with clean, running water and then apply liquid soap. Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails, then scrub for at least 20 seconds.
- Rinse with clean, running water. Keep fingers pointing down. Use a clean towel to dry your hands and turn off the faucet.
- Put all your supplies on a clean cloth or paper towel. Open a plastic trash bag.
- Peel back the edges of the dressing packages.
- Clean the scissors with soap and water. Cut each piece of tape 4 inches longer than the dressing.

Step 2. Remove the old dressing

- Put on disposable gloves.
- Loosen the tape by pulling gently toward the incision. Remove the dressing 1 layer at a time.
- Look at the dressing to see if there's any drainage. If you see drainage, call your healthcare provider if:
 - You see more drainage than before
 - The color of the drainage has changed
 - The drainage has an odor or smells bad
- Put the dressing into a plastic bag that seals at the top.
- Remove your gloves, put them in the plastic bag, and seal the bag.
- Wash your hands. Then put on new gloves.

Step 3. Clean and dress the incision

- Gently clean the incision with soap and water. Or use another solution if your healthcare provider tells you to.
 - Don't scrub the incision. Wipe it gently.
 - Pat the incision dry.
 - Don't use any creams, lotions, or antibacterial ointments unless your healthcare provider tells you to.
- Look at the incision to see if it's still closed.

- Look for any redness or swelling around the incision.
- Dress the incision the way your provider tells you to.
- Put all used supplies in a plastic bag that seals at the top.
- Remove your gloves and put them in the plastic bag. Seal the bag and put it in the trash.
- Wash your hands again.

When to call your healthcare provider

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

- Bleeding from the incision, or an opening of the incision where it had been closed
- More redness, swelling, or pain in or around the incision
- More fluid leaking or foul-smelling fluid leaking
- Change in the color of the incision
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as advised by your provider

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