

Royal Brompton Hospital
Harefield Hospital

Hygiene and wound care for patients having surgery

This leaflet explains why hygiene and wound care are important when you have heart or lung surgery. It does not replace personal advice from a healthcare professional. Please ask your nurse or surgical team if you have any questions.

Why is hygiene and wound care important?

Our skin protects us from bacteria (germs) and infection. During surgery, the skin is cut and the risk of infection increases. Good hygiene and wound care reduce the risk of your surgical wounds becoming infected.

Surgical wounds

Before your surgery, your surgeon will explain where they will cut your skin. The cuts are called surgical wounds. The size and location of your surgical wounds depends on your type of surgery. For most operations, you will have one main surgical wound.

As well as surgical wounds, you may have a small wound in your hand, arm or groin, where a cannula goes into a vein. A cannula is a small plastic tube that is used for fluids and medicines during and after surgery.

Before you have surgery

Body hair

Do not shave or remove hair from your chest, arms, legs or groin for 7 days before you come in to hospital.

Shaving can damage the skin and increase the risk of infection.

When you come into hospital, nurses will help you prepare your skin for your operation.

Personal hygiene

You do not need to bring your own soap, towels or gown in to hospital. When you arrive, we will give you:

- liquid antimicrobial soap, pictured right
- clean, disposable towels and flannels
- a clean gown
- clean linen on your bed

We provide you with disposable flannels and towels.

This is because bacteria can grow quickly on a damp, re-usable flannel, especially when left in a toilet bag.



The night before your operation (at home or in hospital)

It is important to wash thoroughly with liquid antimicrobial soap to reduce the risk of infection. It is also important to use clean towels and flannels.

A nurse will give you a liquid antimicrobial soap at the pre-admission clinic, or in hospital. Antimicrobial soap kills bacteria on your skin.

If you were given antimicrobial soap at your pre-admission clinic:

- use about a quarter of the soap the night before your operation
- bring the rest of the soap in to hospital, to use later

How to wash thoroughly

If possible, have a shower rather than a bath, when washing in preparation for your surgery. Running water helps get rid of the bacteria on your skin.

Wet your skin and put lots of antimicrobial soap on the flannel. Wash your skin firmly with the flannel. Remember to wash well under skin folds, such as breasts and groin. Leave the soap on for one minute before rinsing. Rinse your skin under running water to get rid of all the soap.

If you don't have a shower, stand in the bath to soap yourself and use a jug of clean water to wash off the soap.

Dry your skin well, with clean towels. Dry your chest first, then dry the rest of your body.

If you are in hospital, your nurse can help you. Your nurse will also give you clean towels and flannels.

The morning of your operation (in hospital)

Washing

Have a shower, as described on page 2, using antimicrobial soap. Your nurse will help you if needed.

Body hair

- **Heart operation patients.** You usually need to remove some body hair using disposable clippers, which your nurse will give you. You can clip your own hair, or your nurse can help you.
- **Lung operation patients.** You usually do not need to remove any body hair. The nurse will check you are fully prepared before you go to theatre. Please bring a pair of non-slip slippers, as you need to walk to theatre.

After your operation

A nurse will cover each wound with a dressing. The medical and nursing staff will check your dressings every day.

After heart surgery

Your wound will usually be covered with a dressing while you are in hospital with us.

After lung surgery

A dressing will cover the wound for the first day or 2 but all wounds will be assessed and managed on an individual basis.

The dressings are waterproof, so you can have a shower. But avoid placing a jet of water directly on the wounds and make sure it is not too hot. If water does get under the dressing, let your nurse know as it will need changing.

Washing

Have a shower or get help with washing every day to get rid of bacteria on your skin. Your nurse can help, if needed.

Use clean towels every time you have a shower. After your shower, put your towels in the bathroom linen skips, or give them to a nurse.

If you have a chest drain, your nurse will explain how to have a shower.

Washing your hands

Washing your hands gets rid of bacteria and helps stop infection. Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly, especially before eating and after using the toilet.

Do not touch your cannula or wounds, as bacteria can move from your hands to your wounds.

Do not let anyone touch your cannula or wounds, unless they have washed their hands with soap and water, or alcohol hand gel (available on wards).

Antibiotics

Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to prevent an infection.

Patients who wear a bra

It is normal for your body to hold some fluid after an operation. A bra will give your wound important support.

If you're having a:

- **Heart operation**

Bring at least 2 soft, front-fastening non-wired bras (see below for more information).

- **Lung operation**

You may be asked to bring in two soft, non-wired cotton bras. It depends on the type of surgery you are having.

Bras for heart patients

We recommend heart patients wear BHIS cardiothoracic support bras. These front-fastening bras are designed for patients who have a chest wound following heart surgery.

You can order BHIS bras online in a range of sizes at www.cuiwear.com or www.bhisbra.co.uk

Large department stores also stock front-fastening bras. If you have any questions or concerns, speak to the pre-admission clinic team.

Please note that in addition to the bras you bring to hospital, you will be given a BHIS bra in theatre.

Front-fastening bras are better because the lower front hooks can be left open, to stop rubbing on the wound. The bra will still be able to support the wound with the lower fasteners of the bra open.

Unfastened lower hooks may be more comfortable when sitting. For this reason, back-fastening or bras with zippers in the front are not recommended.



Person wearing a front-fastening bra

If a bra fits well, you should be able to get two fingers to fit comfortably under your bra band. The band should not dig into your skin.

If you are wearing a BHIS bra, the label should be worn on the outside (see picture on page 4) when you are in hospital. This is so we can see the size details in case you need to be given a different sized-bra.

You will need to wear a bra during the day and at night for about 4 to 6 weeks after your operation.

Vest for chest support after surgery

After surgery, we might ask you to wear a chest vest to help your bones heal, usually for about a month.

You can have the vest next to your skin, or you can wear the vest over a T-shirt if it is more comfortable.

We will give you a chest vest. You can also order a chest vest online in a range of sizes at www.cuiwear.com

Leaving hospital

Before you leave hospital, a nurse will take off your dressings and check your wounds. If your wounds are healing well, the nurse will leave them uncovered.

If you still need a dressing, the nurse will ask your district nurse or practice nurse to remove your dressings when you get home.

Remember: do not touch your wounds as bacteria can spread from your hands to your wounds.

At home

Wash every day, using liquid or antimicrobial liquid soap. Use warm water and avoid high temperatures.

It is safe to get your wounds wet under running water, but avoid soaking your wounds in the water jet of a shower.



Person wearing a chest vest

Wash your wounds gently. It is okay if you get some soap on your wounds. But do not put soap directly onto your wounds for 8 weeks after your operation until your wounds have healed completely.

Bath or shower?

We recommend having a shower, because:

- Running water is better for your wounds than bath water.
- Getting out of a shower is easier and safer. Getting out of a bath puts strain on your chest muscles.

Wash with a liquid soap or antimicrobial liquid soap and water. Avoid getting soap directly on your wounds, and rinse with clean tap water.

If you do not have access to a shower, please ask your nurse for advice on how to strip wash during your recovery period.

Drying your wounds

Gently pat your wounds dry. Be careful not rub your wounds.

Always use 2 clean, dry towels:

- Use 1 towel to dry the wounds above your waist. Then use it to dry the rest of your body above the waist.
- Use the second towel to dry your wounds below your waist. Then use it to dry the rest of your body below your waist.

Do not share your towels with anyone else.

Checking your wounds

Check your wounds every day to make sure they are healing well. Look out for changes that may need treatment.

Please contact your GP or surgical team immediately if you have any of these symptoms:

- a wound looks red or angry
- new or increasing redness around a wound
- an obvious change in the colour of the skin around a wound
- a new noticeable heat from the wound
- more pain from a wound
- new swelling of the wound
- pus or more fluid leaking from a wound
- a bad smell from a wound
- any new opening of a wound
- feeling generally unwell or having an unexplained fever
- if you hear a 'clicking' sound from your chest (this needs to be checked to make sure your chest bone is stable and not moving)

Wound photographs

Your nurse may take a photograph of your chest wound for you to take home. You can compare your wound with the photo to check for any changes.

The photo helps you notice changes, so you can get treatment quickly, if needed.

Monitoring your wounds after you leave hospital

After you leave hospital, you will receive a secure, weekly request by text or email from us.

In the text, we will ask you to send us photo/s of your wounds and information about how they are healing. Our staff will review the photos and information. Staff will provide reassurance, advice or provide a referral for your wounds, if needed. They will respond within 24 hours and often in less than 1 hour.

Please send in photo/s and information on your wound whether your wound is healing as expected or not. This is important to help staff monitor any changes.

If you are discharged from hospital and have not received a request asking for photo/s and information after one week:

Email gstt.centralwoundhub@nhs.net to start the service. Do not send photos to this email address.

If it is an emergency, please do not wait for a response. Seek urgent medical attention.

Treatment after hospital

If your GP is treating your wounds, but the wounds do not get visibly better after 1 week, please phone your surgical team or ward (see page 9).

Heart surgery is considered 'implant surgery' because of the wires used in the chest. These can make treating infection more difficult.

For this reason, it is important that you contact us as soon as possible if you have any concerns about your wounds.

Travelling

If you travel as a passenger in a car, put padding between your clothes and the seatbelt for the first 2 weeks. The padding will help stop rubbing against your chest wound.

Patient videos

How to stop your wound getting infected

Watch these 3 videos about how to stop your wound getting infected after you have had surgery:

- Reducing the risk of infection
- What causes wound infection?
- Surgical wound healing

To access all 3 videos, scan the QR code (shown right) with your smartphone or tablet. Or use the web link shown below.

www.rbht.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/patients/infection-prevention/preventing-wound-infection



Looking after your surgical wound at home

Watch this video to learn about looking after your surgical wound at home.

Scan the QR code shown on the right.

Or search on YouTube for:

'Looking after your surgical wound at home'



This video is also available as an audio described version.

Scan the QR code shown on the right.

Or search on YouTube for:

'Looking after your surgical wound at home'



The BHIS cardiothoracic support bra

You can also see a video about BHIS cardiothoracic support bra:

Scan the QR code shown on the right.

Or search online for: www.rbht.nhs.uk/bhistm-bra



Support and more information

If you have any questions, please contact your GP or practice nurse. You can also contact the ward staff or your surgical team.

Contact us

On the phone numbers below:

Royal Brompton Hospital switchboard	0330 12 88121
Princess Alexandra ward	020 7351 8516
Elizabeth ward	020 7351 8595
Sir Reginald Wilson ward	020 7351 8483
Paul Wood ward	020 7351 8598
York ward	020 7351 8592

Cardiac liaison nurse – Royal Brompton Hospital

Contact the hospital switchboard on **0330 12 88121** and ask for the operator, then ask the operator to connect you to the cardiac liaison nurse on call.

Harefield Hospital switchboard	0330 12 88121
Cedar ward	01895 828 525
Maple ward	01895 828 552
Juniper ward	01895 828 588

Was this leaflet useful?

If you have any comments about this information, we'd be happy to hear from you.
[email](mailto:gstt.healthcontent@nhs.net) gstt.healthcontent@nhs.net

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please contact the department your appointment is with.

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern about any service or department at Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals. Contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

- Royal Brompton Hospital **phone** 020 7349 7715
- Harefield Hospital **phone** 01895 826 572

Or [email](mailto:gstt.rbhh-pals@nhs.net) gstt.rbhh-pals@nhs.net

NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day, **phone** 111 **web** www.111.nhs.uk

Become a member of the Trust

Members contribute to Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it's up to you how you get involved. To find out more, **phone** 0800 731 0319 **email** gstt.members@nhs.net or **web** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

Resource number: New RBH/HH

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A list of sources is available on request