



University
Hospitals Sussex
NHS Foundation Trust

Identifying a wound infection

Patient information

Why have I been given this information?

You have been given this information because you have a wound that is healing, or you are looking after someone who has a wound.

What is this information about?

This information tells you about normal symptoms while your wound is healing. It also tells you how to spot serious symptoms of infection, and what to do in an emergency.

What causes wound infection?

Our skin is covered in many bacteria. These naturally occur on our skin and are mostly harmless. Our skin prevents them from entering the body and protects us from infection.

Wound infection occurs when some harmful bacteria take advantage of a break in the skin, like a wound, and multiply.

What are signs that my wound is healing normally?

It is normal to be cautious of infection when you have a wound, but the body is very good at healing and has defences against infection.

The body must start up its immune system to help with healing. This means that some mild signs are expected while the wound heals:

- Mild redness or swelling around the wound
- Mild warmth over the wound, which reduces over time
- The wound produces fluid
- Mild pain or discomfort which is improving over time
- Some tingling or 'electric shock' sensations that reduce as the wound heals.

Antibiotics are not always required for wound healing unless there is evidence of an infection.

What increases the risk of wound infection?

All of these things increase the risk of an infection in your wound:

- If the wound comes from a human or animal bite
- If there is dirt or debris in the wound

- If you are on medication that lowers your immune system (for example, arthritis medication)
- If you have a condition that lowers your immune system. Please talk to your doctor or nurse about your medical conditions
- If you have diabetes
- If you smoke or Vape
- If you have a poor diet.

What are the signs and symptoms of wound infection?

Symptoms of mild infection:

- Spreading redness
- Increased heat
- Increased swelling
- Increased or new pain
- Increased fluid leaking from wound.

How is a mild infection treated?

Mild infection can usually be treated with specially medicated dressings, but sometimes oral antibiotics may be needed.

Your clinician may swab the wound. This means they will run a cotton swab over your wound to collect the bacteria. We can then test the bacteria to work out which antibiotics would work best.

You should always tell your care team if you feel concerned about your wound. Their contact details are below.

Symptoms of serious infection:

In some cases, infection can become more serious and progress into a condition called sepsis.

This is an emergency and requires immediate treatment from your nearest A&E department.

Signs of sepsis include:

- Change in mental state, like confusion or disorientation
- Diarrhoea (runny poo), feeling sick or being sick

- Slurred speech
- Severe muscle pain
- Severe breathlessness
- Urinating (weeing) less than normal.
For example, not urinating for a day
- Loss of consciousness
- High temperature (fever) or low body temperature
- Cold, clammy and pale or mottled skin
- Fast heartbeat
- Fast breathing
- Chills and shivering
- Feeling dizzy or faint.

What should I do if I, or someone I am looking after, have symptoms of a serious infection?

Be advised

Sepsis is an emergency and requires immediate treatment.

If you or someone you are caring for experiences any of these symptoms, call 999 and seek emergency medical attention.

Who can I contact for further information and advice?

In an emergency call **999**

Email the Plastic Surgery Department uhsussex.plasticsteam@nhs.net

Call the Plastic Surgery Department on **07771 984525**

Plastic Surgery Department Monday to Thursday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm

Plastic Surgery Department Friday 8:00 am to 1:00 pm

If out of hours call **111**, or contact your GP for advice.

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