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Changing A Surgical Dressing

When to change a dressing/bandage

It is time to change a surgical bandage when the dressing is visibly soiled/bloody/wet or when the adhesive has come off the skin, breaking the dressing-skin barrier.

Step-By-Step Instructions On How To Properly Change a Post-Operative Dressing

Changing a dressing is not difficult, but it must be done correctly to protect the incision and prevent infection. Ensure your hands are clean and have gloves available if needed. Make sure you have all the new dressings, towel/washcloth, water and gloves needed before starting with the steps below.

1. Identify that your dressing needs to be changed. Soiled dressings must be changed promptly to avoid excess moisture to the incision which can affect wound healing and increase the risk of infection.
2. Wash your hands before touching the dressing. Proper hand washing is the best way to prevent infection.
3. Remove the bandage/dressing carefully. This is best done by pulling the skin away from the dressing, which minimizes pain as the skin around the incision can be tender.
4. Once the dressing is off, visually inspect the incision carefully. Ensure there is no excessive redness around the incision and that there is no drainage coming from the incision. There may be dry blood between staples/sutures which is expected. It should look like the photo on the left. If it looks like the photo on the right, please contact Dr. Tsuji's office or go to your nearest emergency department, as this needs assessment for concerns of infection.



Before cleaning.
Some dried blood
between staples.



After cleaning.
Not red around
incision, no
excessive warmth.



Red, hot, +/- drainage
Call Dr. Tsuji ASAP.

5. Wash your hand again. Before touching the incision, wash your hands again as you have touched a soiled dressing.
6. Clean the incision with clean water and towel/washcloth. Do not rub the incision. Use a dabbing motion and pat dry.
7. Check the incision again. It should look like the middle photo above. Redness along the incision is expected as this is how it heals. The skin should be well approximated by staples/sutures without any gaps. Check for any drainage from the wound of blood or pus.
8. Wash hands again.
9. Place the new bandage/dressing.
10. Dispose of old bandage/dressing.
11. Wash your hands.