

Wet-to-Dry Dressing

Changing your dressing at home

This handout for surgery patients explains how to change a wet-to-dry gauze dressing.

What is a wet-to-dry gauze dressing?

Wet-to-dry gauze dressings are often used with open wounds. They help clean the wound and remove dead tissue. The dressing is changed 1 to 3 times a day.

How to Change Your Dressing

Before You Start

- If you need pain medicine, take it about 30 to 40 minutes before you change your dressing.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water.



Changing Your Dressing

- Remove the current dressing. It is normal to have some bleeding when you do this. Using a piece of gauze, apply light pressure to the wound to stop the bleeding.
- Gently wash your wound with soap and water. You can use a soapy washcloth at the sink, or use soap and water when you take a shower.
- After washing, rinse your wound well. If you are on well water, do a final rinse with bottled water. Gently pat it dry.
- Open a new package of dry gauze. Take 1 piece out and get it wet using regular tap water from the sink. If you have well water, use bottled water or sterile saline instead of the well water.
- Squeeze the gauze so that it is just damp, not soaking wet.
- Unfold the damp gauze and place it over your wound.

Always wash your hands well with soap and water before changing your dressing.

- **If your wound is shallow**, cover the entire wound with a single layer of gauze. If the wound covers a large area, use more single pieces of gauze to cover the entire wound.
- **If your wound is deep**, you may need to pack the damp gauze into the wound cavity. Use only 1 long piece of gauze from a roll to do this. Try not to use many short pieces, since they can get lost in the wound.

- Hold the dressing in place with a dry bandage. Use a gauze wrap or a gauze pad and tape.

How often should I change the dressing?

Repeat all the steps under “How to Change Your Dressing” as often as your doctor has told you. This can be 1 to 3 times a day, depending on your wound.

When to Call

Call one of the numbers in the “Questions” box on this page if you have any of these signs of infection:

- Fever higher than 100.4°F (38°C)
- More pain
- More swelling
- A bad smell
- Cloudy green-yellow drainage from your wound
- Pus (milky-cloudy drainage) from your wound
- More redness of the skin around your wound
- New or an increase in drainage or re-opening of a healed incision

Questions?

If you have questions or concerns, call the hospital where you had your surgery:

If you are a patient at UW Medical Center:

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call UWMC Center for Reconstructive Surgery: 206.598.1217 and press 8.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the resident on call for Surgery to be paged.

If you are a patient at Harborview Medical Center:

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call:

Your surgery clinic:

HMC Burn/Plastic Surgery Clinic:
206.744.5735

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call the 24-hour nurse at the HMC Community Care Line: 206.744.2500