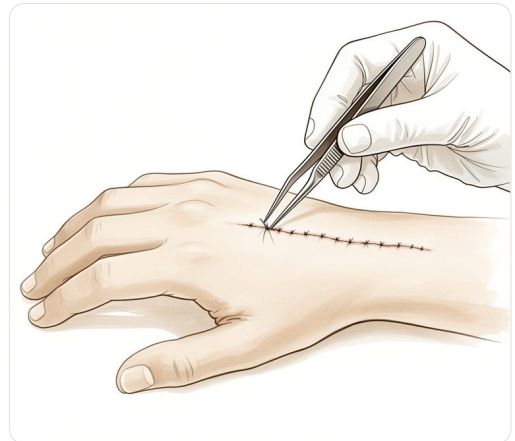


Your wound check and stitch removal

At the wound check any non-dissolvable stitches are removed from the healed wound — quick and not usually painful.

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After your operation you'll be booked in for a **wound check**: a short appointment to make sure the wound has healed properly and, if you have the kind of stitches that need removing, to take them out. It's a quick, routine visit, and for most people it's the point at which the early restrictions start to lift. This page explains what to expect, so none of it comes as a surprise. (For day-to-day care of the wound itself in the meantime, see our separate [wound care](#) page; this page is about the check-up and the stitches.)

When it happens and who does it

The wound check is usually around 10 to 14 days after surgery, though the exact timing depends on the operation and where the wound is; we'll give you a date before you go home. It might be done in our rooms, or we may arrange for your GP or a practice nurse to do it closer to home. Either way it's the same simple check, and whoever sees you will know what to look for.

Until that appointment, the most important thing is to leave the dressing intact — and, for hand and elbow wounds, dry. (Shoulder dressings are waterproof: showering water over them from day 1 is fine; see [wound care](#).) Don't be tempted to peek underneath or change it yourself unless we've specifically asked you to. A clean, undisturbed dressing keeps the wound protected while the skin knits together. If the dressing comes loose, gets soaked, or you're worried about what's underneath, ring us rather than redoing it blind.

The different kinds of stitches

Not everyone's wound is closed the same way, and how it's closed decides whether anything needs removing.

- **Dissolvable (absorbable) stitches** disappear on their own over a few weeks; your body slowly breaks them down, so there's nothing to take out. Often they're hidden under the skin and you'll never see them. Sometimes a stitch works its way to the surface as it dissolves and you notice a small bristle or a tiny pimple-like spot along the line; this is called "**spitting**," and it's usually nothing to worry about. It settles as the stitch finishes dissolving. Don't pull at it; if it's catching or sore, mention it at your check.

- **Non-dissolvable stitches** are the kind that need removing, and that's the main job of the wound check, usually around 10 to 14 days, once the skin has sealed.
- Sometimes the skin is held with **Steri-strips** (thin sticky paper strips) as well as stitches. These don't need removing; they peel or fall off by themselves over a week or two.
- After a **shoulder or elbow replacement**, and after **cubital tunnel** and **radial tunnel** surgery, the wound is usually closed with a **mesh-and-glue dressing** instead. A fine self-adhesive mesh is laid over the wound to hold the skin edges together, and a liquid skin adhesive is painted over the top and left to set. There is nothing to take out: the whole thing lifts and peels away by itself after about one to two weeks.

Whichever you have, let it come away naturally rather than picking at it.

If you're not sure which kind you have, that's completely fine; we'll know, and we'll tell you at the appointment.

What removal feels like

If you do have stitches to come out, the good news is that taking them out is much easier than you might expect. Each stitch is snipped and gently slid free. You'll feel a light tug or a small pinch as each one comes away: a slightly odd sensation, but not usually painful, and it's over in a minute or two. A tiny spot of bleeding here and there is normal. Most people are surprised by how quick and uneventful it is.

What we're checking for

The wound check isn't only about the stitches. Whoever sees you is also making sure the wound has healed and sealed properly and that there are no signs of infection; they'll look for things like spreading redness, swelling, warmth, or any discharge, and ask whether it's been comfortable. If everything looks as it should, that's your green light to start easing back towards normal.

After the check

Once the wound has been confirmed healed and any stitches are out:

- **Getting it wet:** you can usually start **letting the wound get wet and washing normally** in the shower at this point; we'll confirm exactly when, as it occasionally varies. Pat it dry gently rather than rubbing, and avoid soaking it in a bath, pool or spa for a little longer.
- **Scar care:** once the wound is fully closed, you can begin **gentle scar massage** to keep the scar soft and supple; see our [scar management](#) page for how and when to start.
- **Activity:** the check is often when some of the early restrictions lift. Follow the specific advice we give you for your operation about lifting, driving and returning to work or sport; those milestones are set by the surgery you had, not just by the state of the wound.

When to seek help sooner

You don't have to wait for the appointment if something looks wrong. **Contact us, your GP, or seek medical care before your scheduled check if the wound:**

- becomes **increasingly red, hot, swollen or painful**, especially if the redness is spreading
- starts **leaking fluid, pus or blood**, or develops a **bad smell**
- **opens up or gapes** along the line before it has healed
- is accompanied by a **fever** or feeling generally unwell

A wound that's healing well settles and quietens down over the first week or two. Anything that's heading the other way is worth a phone call; we would always rather check it early than have you wait.