

Patient information

Care of your Pin Sites and External Fixator

Introduction

Your operation has meant that you have been given an external fixator (metal frame with pins) or wires/pins that enter the skin and are fixed into your bones. This is a common procedure but requires careful aftercare to make sure that it is safe and effective.

Risks/Benefits/Alternatives

Your Doctor will have discussed the alternatives to this treatment with you before your operation but having wires/pins or an external fixator has been judged as the best treatment option for your condition or injury. The wires/pins go directly into your bone and you are at risk of developing an infection if these are not looked after properly.

What you will need to clean your pin sites

Before you leave the ward you will be given the following items to help you look after your pin sites:

- Packets of gauze
- Sterile dressing packs
- Tape
- Saline sachets (you may also use cooled boiled water)

Daily Pin Site Care

Before you leave the hospital your nurse will have shown you the best way to care for your pin sites and will have made sure that you are confident and safe to do this. It is important that your pin sites are cleaned every day. If your pin sites are not cared for properly you are at risk of developing an infection, which could spread to the bone.

The following steps are a reminder of what you have been shown.

- 1 Before you start, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, dry your hands on a clean towel that is for your use only.

- 2 Prepare your equipment on a clean surface.
- 3 Remove the existing dressings: check the pin sites for any redness, tenderness, swelling or leakage.
- 4 Wash your hands again.
- 5 Clean around each pin using a new piece of gauze dipped into the saline solution, use each piece of gauze only once on each pin site as you have been shown and discard afterwards.
- 6 Do the above as many times as necessary for all pins to be clean and crust free. If the pin is stuck to the skin gently massage until it is free.
- 7 Dry well with a clean piece of gauze.
- 8 When the pin sites are dry, wrap a clean piece of gauze around the pin site and secure with the tape.
- 9 If you have an external fixator you must also clean the frame using the same technique as for the pin sites.
- 10 When you have finished, place all the waste in the plastic bag provided in the pack, and put in your non-recyclables bin.
- 11 Finally, wash your hands again thoroughly.

What should I be worried about?

All pin sites will leak a little immediately after insertion, but as the pin sites settle this should become less and eventually stop. If the leakage should start again at any time advice should be sought.

Things to look out for:

- If the discharge becomes thick, coloured or smells
- If the pin sites become red, swollen, tender or painful.
- If any of the pins or other parts of the external fixator become loose

If you are worried about any of these things you should contact the hospital straight away. We may ask you to come to the hospital so that we can check the pin sites and frame. We may also ask you to see your Practice Nurse at regular intervals to make sure that there are no problems.

We will advise you about showering as this may depend on the type of fixator you have been given

Telephone Advice

You can get advice over the telephone by contacting Ward F3 on 01284 713313 (anytime) or Fracture Clinic on 01284 713306 (office hours only)

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the disabledgo website link below:

<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>

© West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust