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# Discharge Instructions: Packing a Wound

You have a wound that needs a special dressing, or packing. When a wound is deep, or when it tunnels under the skin, packing the wound can help it heal. The packing material soaks up any drainage from the wound, which helps the tissues heal from the inside out. Without the packing, the wound could close at the top. This would trap fluid and possibly bacteria in the deeper areas of the wound causing your wound not to heal. The wound could also get infected. You were shown how to pack your wound before you left the hospital. These steps will help you remember how to take care of your wound. Follow any specific directions from your healthcare provider.

## Gather your supplies

Keep your supplies all in 1 place. Put them in a basket or large bag. You will need the following:

- Packing material
- Sterile wetting solution
- Sterile gloves
- A clean bowl
- Scissors
- A clean towel
- A bandage to put on the top of the wound after you have packed it
- Tape
- Sterile cotton swabs
- Alcohol or alcohol wipes
- Supplies to clean the wound
- A small plastic bag for old dressing supplies

## Getting ready

- Put pets and children in another room, away from your work area
- Wash your hands before touching any of your supplies:
  - Turn on the water.
  - Wet your hands and wrists.
  - Use liquid soap from a pump dispenser. Work up a lather.
  - Scrub your hands thoroughly.
  - Rinse your hands with your fingers pointing toward the drain.

- Dry your hands with a clean cloth or paper towel. Use this towel to turn off the faucet.
  - Remember, once you have washed your hands, don't touch anything other than your supplies. Wash your hands again if you touch anything, like furniture or your clothes.
- Clean the area where you will set out your dressing supplies.
- Put a clean towel over the area and set a clean bowl on it. Don't touch the inside of the bowl.
- Clean the scissors with alcohol or an alcohol wipe and place on the clean towel.

## **Prepare the packing material**

- Wash your hands again.
- Pour enough wetting solution into the clean bowl to wet the packing material.
- Cut off a length of packing material and drop it carefully into the bowl of wetting solution. (Remember, the amount of packing material needed to fill the wound should become less and less as the area heals. You will need to adjust the length of the packing material over time.)
- Open your new outer dressing material and place it on the towel. Keep it away from the bowl, and don't get it wet.
- Cut pieces of tape to desired lengths. You will use these strips to hold your outer dressing in place. For now, hang the pieces of tape on the edge of your work surface.
- Gently remove your existing bandage (old tape, outer dressing, and packing). Check the bandage for any drainage or odor. Put these items in a small plastic bag for disposal.
- Inspect the wound. Look for signs that it isn't healing normally (lsee When to call your healthcare provider).

## **Clean and pack the wound**

- Wash your hands thoroughly again. Use soap and clean, running water.
- Clean the wound as you were shown by your healthcare provider.
- Put on the gloves. Gently squeeze the packing material to get rid of excess wetting solution. The packing material should be wet, but not dripping.
- Gently put the packing material into the wound. Packing should fill the wound space completely, but not tightly. Filling the space tightly will cause pressure and pain. Use a cotton swab to gently guide the packing into small or tunneled areas.
- Put the new outer dressing over the packing and wound site.
- Tape the outer dressing in place.
- Remove your gloves.

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- Wash your hands again with soap and water.

## **Follow-up**

Make a follow-up appointment. It's recommended that you be seen within 48 hours after the first time a packing is placed.

## **When to call your healthcare provider**

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of the following occur:

- Increased drainage from the wound
- Redness in or around the wound
- Increased pain or swelling in or around the wound
- Wound tissue that changes from pink to white, yellow, or black in color
- Odor coming from the wound
- Increased size or depth of the wound
- Fever above 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Shaking chills