

Glossary

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| Bone pins Bone screws Wires | These terms are used to describe the rods or wires that connect your fixator to the bone. |
| Fixator | The external device that holds your fracture in the right position until it has healed. |
| Pin site | The hole in the skin that the bone pin passes through. |

Treatment of your fracture

Your surgeon has treated your fracture with an external fixator. This means that you have a number of pin sites in your limb where the bone screws pass through your skin and attach the fixator to your bone. It is these "holes" in the skin that you need to take care of. This sheet is not intended to replace your surgeon's advice; it is an aide-memoire and guide to help you to help yourself.

Pin site infection

Pin site infection is common and can be treated with antibiotics, but good pin site care will minimise the risk of getting an infection. At the early stages of treatment your pin sites will look red and inflamed, which is a natural reaction to the operation, your surgeon and their medical staff will help you to avoid this natural reaction developing into an infection.

Post Operative Guidance

Before you leave hospital you should receive advice from the nursing staff on pin site care. You should follow their guidance as this will help to avoid pin site infection. Taking care of your pin sites will help to make sure that your pins do not loosen and that your fracture heals properly.

Items Required

- Brand-new soft toothbrush
- Suitable, clean, container.

First few days

Immediately after the operation your pin sites will be protected with sponges. These will be removed at your first clinic visit. Do not disturb your sponge dressings until they are removed in clinic.

Contact details:

Hospital:

Name:

Telephone Number:

After sponges have been removed

From this point on you need to keep to the following routine. You do not need a new toothbrush each time, but make sure it is new from the start and is kept clean.

- 1 Do the following every morning and every evening
- 2 Wash your hands
- 3 Make sure that the container and toothbrush are clean
- 4 Use water that has been boiled and left to cool.
- 5 Rinse the toothbrush before use
- 6 Inspect each pin site
- 7 Using the toothbrush and warm water gently brush around each pin to remove any discharge or crusting. When you've finished the pins should be shiny and clean and the skin free of debris.
- 8 Wash the toothbrush and container, store the toothbrush in the container in an antiseptic solution.

Medication

It is common to be prescribed medication for pain. However, you must be careful not to take any anti-inflammatory tablets such as Brufen or Voltarol. This group of tablets, known as NSAID's (Non Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs) are known to slow down fracture healing.

Pin Site Infection

It is common to get infections around the pin sites but these usually settle quickly with the right treatment. A clear discharge often comes from the pins nearest your ankle: this is just normal tissue fluid. Infection causes redness in the skin around the pin, a discharge of pus (which looks milky or creamy) and pain. If you get any of these symptoms you should ring the number below during working hours. The doctor will see you and take a swab of the pin site to find out which bacteria is causing the infection. He will probably give you some antibiotic tablets. These only need to be taken until the infection symptoms have cleared up. The clinic nurse may decide to dress the pin sites with gauze soaked in Betadine, an antiseptic, for a few days.

Smoking

We know that smoking causes all sorts of health problems and, unfortunately for smokers, it also slows down or even stops bone from healing. Tibial fractures take up to 5 weeks longer to heal in smokers, and non-unions (when the fracture fails to heal at all) are almost always in smokers. If you stop smoking now, your fracture will heal quicker and you will reduce the risk of it not healing.

Developed in conjunction with the University Hospital of North Staffordshire
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