

Care of your frame / external fixator and pin sites

Before you leave hospital you will be shown how to care for your frame and pin sites. This brochure will assist you with what you need to know.

What is a frame or external fixator?

A frame or external fixator is a device that is attached to the outside of the body. This is used to correct the limb strength, length or position. Pins and wires pass through the skin to secure the bone.

How do I check my frame?

- Check your frame each day to make sure any parts are not loose
- Check the wires and pins do not move and are solid and secure
- Check the nuts and bolts of the frame are tight and secure. Keep your frame clean and free from dust.
- Clean each pin from the skin with a new alcohol and Chlorhexidine prep pad

If you notice any loose wires, pins or bolts please contact the Orthopaedic Clinic as soon as possible. See contact details over page.

What are pin sites?

A pin site is the area where the pin (metal) meets the skin. It is important that you care for these areas properly as bacteria can pass down the pin site, causing infection in your limb. If infection occurs, it can lead to removal of the device.

Cleaning your pin sites

You will need;

- Alcohol and Chlorhexidine prep pad to clean each pin and the frame
- Topper drain swab
- 0.9% normal saline warmed in a container of warm water
- Cause and bandage

Instructions

1. Wash your hands with warm soapy water, including between your fingers and the back of your hands
2. With your fingertips and a piece of gauze, gently massage the skin around the pin in a circular motion to help bring any drainage to the surface of the skin. This will help the skin to not stick to the pin
3. Use a new piece of gauze on each pin. Soak in the cleansing solution and then wring out
4. If you notice any crust developing leave these in place, it is part of the healing process
5. Using a new 2% Chlorhexidine and alcohol swab for each pin, clean the pin itself (away from the skin)
6. Wrap the topper drain swab around each pin site
7. Dispose of used gauze and wipes safely in a rubbish bag/bin

[continued]

Showering

- On the day of your dressing change (occurring 1 – 7 days after surgery) you can undo the dressing and let the shower run over the pins. You must not have a bath (do not immerse your wound)
- You can shower daily after this but it is best to cover your frame and pin sites with a plastic bag so your dressing does not become wet/ once your dressing is wet it will need changing
- You can use a non-scented moisturiser for your skin, but try to avoid areas directly around the pins

What are the signs of a pin site infection?

Even with strict hand washing and careful pin site care, there is still a possibility that your pin sites can become infected.

One or more of the following symptoms may be present;

- Increased pain or soreness at the pin site
- Redness at or around the pin
- Swelling at or around the pin
- Thick or coloured discharge (pus) from the site
- Loosening or movement of the pins
- Feeling tired, unwell or have a fever

If you have any of these please contact the orthopaedic clinic or your GP urgently.

General information

Rest and elevate your limb as instructed by your doctor. Exercise only as directed. If you smoke, please request quit smoking advice as this will help your wound to heal and reduce your chance of infection. Your doctor, nurse or GP can provide more information. Or call Quitline 0800 778 778.

Notes or extra instructions;

Contact us

Department: Orthopaedic Clinic

Phone: (04)385 5952

Hours: 8am-9pm, Monday to Friday and 9am-5pm weekends and public holidays

If you are unsure if you need to visit your GP or medical emergency centre please phone HealthLine for advice;

HealthLine

Phone: 0800 611 116

Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

For smoking cessation advice please phone;

QuitLine

Phone: 0800 778 778

Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

