

Division of Pediatric Orthopaedics

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PIN SITE CARE FOR THE EXTERNAL FIXATOR

Why is the pin site important?

The area where the pin meets the skin is called the pin site. This opening, like any cut or nick in the skin, must be kept clean or there will be a risk of infection. Infection could cause the pin to loosen, require its removal or infection could spread to the bone. It is essential that you care for your pin sites correctly to help prevent infection and to allow for more comfortable healing.

How do I care for my pin sites?

Clean wire and pin sites once per day.

- 1. The first step is to wash your hands thoroughly with antibacterial soap for one minute, using nailbrush.**
- 2. Remove any dressings. You may soak the difficult, encrusted ones with normal saline or run clear water over the site until they loosen. Slowly "teasing" the gauze off causes less pain and bleeding.**
- 3. Inspect all sites for redness, tenderness, and drainage. If sites are clear, normal saline will be used for cleaning; if signs of infection are present, half strength hydrogen peroxide will be used. (Mix 1 part hydrogen peroxide with 1 part saline).**
- 4. Put several cotton-tipped applicators in normal saline and allow to soak for several seconds.**

5. Take one applicator and, using a "rolling motion," apply gentle pressure with the cotton tip at the junction of the skin and the pin or wire site. Do not use excessive force, dig, or try to remove scab around the pin or wire site.
6. Once the site is cleaned, you may clean up the side of the pin or wire if needed. Do not use the applicator on the skin after cleaning a pin or wire.
7. Use a new applicator at each site.
8. If instructed cover the site with a split 2x2.
9. You may be asked to wrap Kerlix gauze around 2 or more half-pins which are close together to create slight compression at the pin insertion site.

DO NOT USE ANTIBIOTIC OINTMENT ON THE PIN SITES. This will only plug the pin site holes. In addition, you should not put any creams or powders near the pin sites.

Can I take a shower with my external fixator?

After you have worn your fixator for 7 to 10 days, and after instructed by the doctor, you may shower while wearing your fixator. While in the shower, gently clean your fixator with soap and water. A liquid antibacterial soap such as Dial or Soft-soap should be used. Be sure to rinse the fixator well. Afterwards, dry the fixator thoroughly with a clean towel. Continue to clean your pin sites in the manner described above.

How will I know if I get an infection?

Even with proper pin site care, your pin sites may still become infected. Signs of infection include:

- ❖ Excessive redness or swelling at the pin sites.
- ❖ Any yellow, green, thick or foul smelling drainage around the pins.
- ❖ Fever of 101 degrees F or higher
- ❖ Chills
- ❖ Numbness, tingling or loss of feeling that does not go away when you raise the affected arm or leg above heart level.
- ❖ Increased pain that is not relieved by pain medicine.

IMPORTANT: If you experience any of these conditions, you should **CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR'S OFFICE IMMEDIATELY** (973-972-0246).

IMPORTANT: If you experience thick colored discharge, redness and/or swelling around the pin sites or fever/chills, you should start the antibiotics prescribed by the doctor. Make sure you take **ALL** of the pills prescribed (usually a 7 or 10 day course). It is important that you **ALWAYS HAVE A FULL COURSE OF ANTIBIOTICS AT HOME** (kept in the refrigerator) so that if you experience signs of infection, you can begin to take the antibiotics immediately.