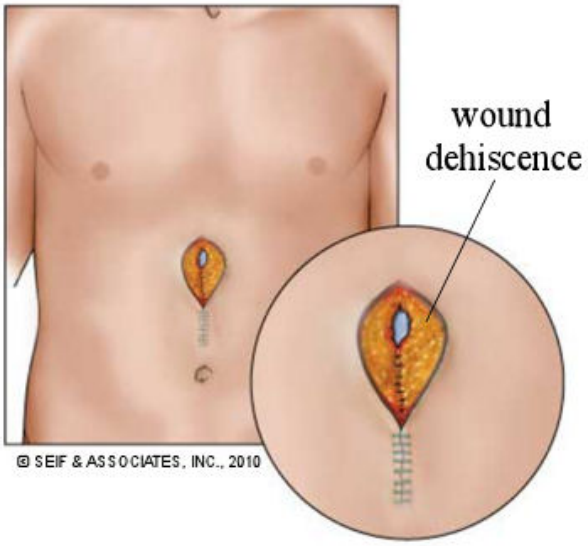
Wound Dehiscence, Wound Failure

Wound failure (*wound dehiscence*) is a failure of an incision to heal properly following surgery. It usually happens 7 to 10 days following surgery. The main cause of wound breakdown in the belly *(abdomen*) is obesity. Fatty tissue does not have as good a blood supply as muscle, so it is easier for the wound to get infected, collect fluids within the wound, and then fall apart. This happens to about 2% of surgical belly wounds and occasionally causes death *(mortalities*). When a wound failure is noticed and treated early, it is not always dangerous. A wound failure often shows up first as bloody fluid leaking from the wound in the first week following surgery. It ranges from surface breakdown of the skin and fatty tissues beneath, to a complete failure of the wound. If your wound fails your organs may show. This is rare. You do not have to worry. An open wound may look terrible to you but it is not dangerous. It is easily handled by your caregiver. If it would happen on an abdominal wound, it is unlikely that the contents of your abdomen will fall out.



Wound dehiscence results in more hospital stay days, increase in cost of care, and disability for the patient. If this is noticed early and treated, it is no longer a deadly problem.

OTHER IMPORTANT FACTORS LEADING TO A WOUND BREAKDOWN ARE:

- Lung (*pulmonary*) disease and smoking.
- Poor diet (*malnutrition*).
- Contamination during the operation (often minimal).
- Stretching of belly area (*gastrointestinal distention*).

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Wash your hands well before and after changing dressings.
- Keep your wound clean
- Follow your caregiver's instructions for how often to change the dressing and packing inside. This keeps the wound clean and cuts down on the chance of a more severe infection.
- Rinse your wound with warm, soapy water four times per day, or as directed by your caregiver.
- After washing, gently pat the wound dry with a clean, soft fabric. As the wound is healing, millions of tiny new blood vessels are forming. Do not rub the wound as this may cause bleeding. Apply dressing to wound as directed.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, and or fever, as directed by your caregiver. Taking pain medicine 30 minutes before changing the wound can help relieve pain.
- Do not soak wound, as in bathing or swimming, until it is healed, or as directed by your caregiver. Avoid work out exercises that cause you to sweat heavily.
- During healing the wound may itch. You may use over-the-counter antihistamines (*diphenhydramine*) in a dosage as recommended on package. If this medication makes you sleepy, take it as a dose at bedtime.
- If your caregiver has prescribed a medication which kills germs *(antibiotics*), take your medication as directed. Take it for the entire length of time it was prescribed, even if the wound appears to be doing well.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- There is increased swelling around the wound or increased pain in the wound.
- There is increasing redness (*inflammation*) around the wound.
- There is an increase in the amount of pus coming from the wound.
- More of the wound breaks open.

- Do not lift more than ten pounds until the wound is completely healed or as instructed by your caregiver.
- You or your child has an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- Your baby is older than 3 months with a rectal temperature of 102º F (38.9º C) or higher.
- **Your baby is 3 months old or younger with a rectal temperature of 100.4º F (38º C) or higher.**

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