

Pin Site Care

Information for patients with an external fixator

Reference Number: ULHT-LFT-3467 v2

Issued: November 2023

Review Date: November 2025



The sites where the wires and pins from your external fixator enter your skin are referred to as pin sites.

Good pin site care is essential to the success of your treatment in an external fixator.

Pin site infection is one of the most common problems you may experience during your treatment in an external fixator.

There are various ways of cleaning pin sites, with little evidence to support one technique over another. The method described here has shown to be effective in minimising the risk of pin site infection and is therefore the method we recommend.

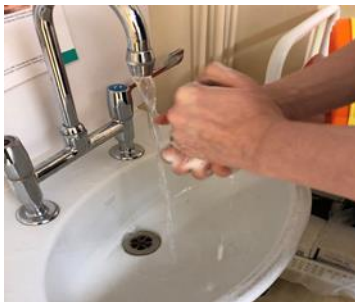
Equipment needed:

- Hand washing facilities
- Cotton buds
- Gauze
- Clean container
- Cool boiled water or saline solution
- Rubbish bag to discard used cotton buds and gauze

Pin Site Cleaning Process

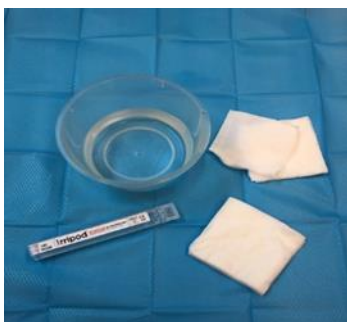
Step 1

Tie back any long hair, roll up long sleeves and remove any watches and bracelets. Wash your hands with soap and water.



Step 2

Pour the cool boiled water or saline solution into a clean bowl and prepare the gauze or cotton buds.



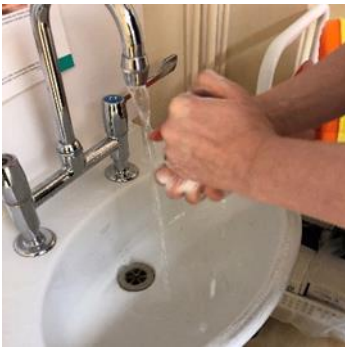
Step 3

Remove the dressings covering the pin sites.



Step 4

Wash your hands again using soap and water.



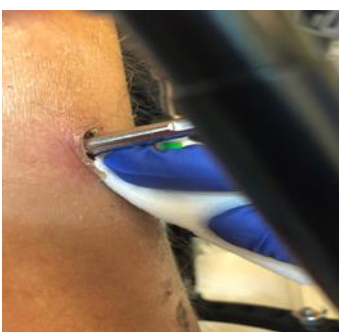
Step 5

Clean each pin site individually. Wipe around each pin site with the wet cotton bud or wet piece of gauze in a circular motion.



Step 6

Remove any scabs and crusts that fall away easily or any that are extending up the pin. Do not remove scabs that are tight to the skin but still clean these as described in Step 5.



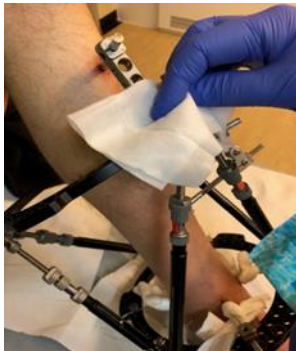
Step 7

To begin with, each pin site will need to be dressed with gauze. You will be taught how to do this before leaving the hospital. Your consultant or their team will advise you when your pin sites do not need to be dressed anymore.



Step 8

The fixator frame can be kept clean using a clean cloth and dried with a clean towel.



How often should I clean my pin sites?

Pin sites must be cleaned daily for the duration of the time the external fixator is in place. This will keep the pin sites clean and reduce the risk of getting an infection.

Can I shower or take a bath?

Once your pin sites are dry you can shower in your external fixator. You should not shower if your pin sites are leaking.

Use a separate towel to dry your external fixator and then complete your pin site care as usual.

It is not advisable to have a bath.

What are the signs of a pin site infection?

It is normal to experience some discomfort around the pin sites throughout your treatment.

If you experience any of the following it could mean that you have a pin site infection:

- Increased pain around the pin sites
- Redness around the pin sites
- Pus leaking from the pin site
- Feeling unwell with a raised temperature

What should I do if I am concerned?

If you have any questions or concerns about your pin site care once you are discharged from the hospital please contact the team looking after you for further guidance.

If you are feeling unwell, during normal working hours please contact your frame team or your GP for advice, or in an emergency attend your nearest Urgent Treatment Centre or Emergency Department.

Department: Orthopaedic Clinic 11 – Telephone 01522 573836

Site: Lincoln County Hospital

United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust has worked with AccessAble to create detailed Access Guides to facilities, wards and departments at our sites.

www.accessable.co.uk/united-lincolnshire-hospitals-nhs-trust

United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.

If you require this information in another language, large print, audio (CD or tape) or braille, please email the Patient Information team at patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk