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Keep it Dry!

Keeping your incision dry after surgery is often a challenge. In general, after surgery I prefer that you shower rather than bathe. This way you decrease the risk of soaking your dressings or incision in dirty water. Here are several tips to help you figure out how to keep clean while not contaminating your incision or damaging your surgical results.

- **Plastic bags:** Nothing beats a good old fashioned plastic bag for keeping your incision dry. However, there are a couple of tips that will help.
 - If you're having surgery on your leg, try getting a garden sized black plastic bag and rather than pulling it up over your leg and taping it at the top, turn it upside down. Poke a small hole in one of the corners and begin to slide it up your leg. Don't stretch it all out. Just allow the increasing size of your leg as you pull it up to stretch the hole. By the time you get to the top of your thigh it should be fairly snug. If it's not, or if you just want to reinforce it, you can then apply duct tape or water-resistant tape along the top. This way, your bare foot is on the floor of the shower. This is safer than having your foot inside a slippery plastic bag. Additionally, if water does seep into the bag, it just runs out the bottom and doesn't form a wet pocket inside the bag.
 - You can always wrap a plastic bag around the site and seal it with duct tape or water resistant tape.
 - Shoulders are particularly difficult to protect from water, but there's really no way to wash your hair, head and neck without getting your bandages or incisions wet! Try making a little half cape out of a piece of plastic bag or Saran wrap. Tape it to your neck. Picture the 3 Musketeers, with their capes draped over their shoulders. (Uh, yah. That's you...in the shower...after your shoulder surgery...).



- **Waterproof bandages or Tegaderm bandages:** These work pretty nicely for keeping incisions dry. But do not leave these bandages on past your shower. They seal the area from water and

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air. They can potentially seal in bacteria as well. So always remove them after you shower and replace with regular dressings or Band-Aids as mentioned in previous instruction sheets.

- **Lawn Chair:** Trying to keep the entire leg or arm out of water can be difficult. If you've had surgery on your leg and you don't have some kind of a bench in your shower stall or tub, then you can use a cheap plastic lawn chair instead. You can then either use a shower hose extension or you can hike your leg out of the area, draping a shower curtain over it to keep it isolated. Shower hoses can also be used to clean under your arms if you've had shoulder surgery.
- **Shower transfer chair:** When you can't put full weight on your leg and you do not have a walk-in shower, a transfer chair can come in handy. I can prescribe one of these for you and they can usually be obtained at a medical supply.
- **Bath Towelettes:** Last but not least, they've come out with handy bath towelettes. They're kind of like giant baby wipes. A lot of hospitals use them now, rather than the basin and washcloth routine. You can find them in most drugstores and on-line. Here are three examples.

http://www.libertytena.com/liberty/unique/154094.php?keyword=bath%20wipes&utm_term=bath%20wipes&

http://nwmedicalsolutions.com/pd_readyflush_large_flushable_wipes.cfm

http://www.amazon.com/No-Rinse-Bathing-Wipes-24-cs/dp/B000RGZTWQ/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&s=hpc&qid=1259614040&sr=1-5