**PURPOSE:**
To remove sutures after healing has occurred.

**CONSIDERATIONS:**
1. Although the physician orders the removal of non-absorbable sutures, there are general guidelines for timing removal based on location:
   a. Head and neck, 3 to 5 days after insertion.
   b. Chest and abdomen, 5 to 7 days after insertion.
   c. Lower extremities, 7 to 10 days after insertion.

**EQUIPMENT:**
- Suture removal tray or sterilized pick-up forceps and suture scissors
- Alcohol or antimicrobial sponges
- Impervious trash bag
- Dressing and tape
- Butterfly strips
- Skin protectant (optional)
- Gloves

**PROCEDURE:**
1. Adhere to Standard Precautions.
2. Explain procedure to patient.
3. Follow clean technique, remove all dressings and discard in appropriate containers.
4. Examine the wound before removing sutures.
5. Observe the wound for gaping, drainage, signs of infection or embedded sutures. Ensure that proper healing has taken place and it is time to remove the stitches.
6. Position the patient so that the suture area is without tension.
7. Assemble the necessary equipment at the bedside and open sterile instrument set.
8. Cleanse suture area thoroughly with antimicrobial sponges.
9. To remove interrupted sutures:
   a. With forceps, grasp the knot of suture with gentle upward pull to slightly expose a small segment of the suture that was below the skin. Cut exposed suture on the opposite side of the knot. No segment of the stitch that is above the skin’s surface is to be drawn below or through the skin.
   b. Still holding the knot, pull the cut suture up and out. Discard suture.
   c. Remove every other suture along the incision line and observe for any gaping of the wound. If gaping occurs, DO NOT remove any of the remaining sutures. Approximate edges, apply butterfly strips and notify the patient's physician. (*See Integumentary - Application of Butterfly Strips.*) If no gaping occurs, continue removal until all sutures have been removed.
10. To remove plain, continuous sutures:
    a. Grasp the first suture and cut that suture on the opposite side of the knot.
    b. Cut the next suture in line on the same side. Pull the first suture out in the direction of the knot. Discard the suture.
11. Following any suture removal:
    a. Cleanse the suture line with a sponge.
    b. For incision line support, prevention of a wide scar or slight skin separation, butterfly strips may be used. Use skin protector to increase length of strips’ adherence. Strips may be left in place 3 to 5 days.
12. Apply dry, sterile dressing secured with tape, if needed.
13. Discard soiled supplies in appropriate containers.

**AFTER CARE:**
1. Document in patient's record:
   a. Procedure and observations.
   b. Patient's response to procedure.
2. Instruct patient/caregiver in care of healing incision line, including:
   a. Reporting redness, discharge or other signs of infection.
   b. Changing the protective dressing.
   c. Showering or bathing, when permitted by physician.
   d. Protecting the incision line from direct sunlight for at least 6 months.

**REFERENCES:**