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# The cotton tipped applicator – a scratch for the itch and more during dermatologic surgery

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## Abstract

An itch during surgery can be distracting. Sterile cotton tipped applicators are inexpensive and multipurpose tools that may be used for a variety of simple surgical tasks such as scratching an itch on the surgeon or patient's face. They may also be used to adjust glasses and turn on surgical lights or the electrocautery machine.

*Keywords: skin, dermatologic surgery, itch, scratch, cotton tipped applicator*

## Introduction

Within the sterile surgical field, minor discomforts from the surgeon or patient are amplified by the inability to quickly provide a remedy. A surgeon experiencing an itch (such as on his or her face) can become distracted and this is often only corrected by exiting the surgical field and de-gloving. Similarly, the need to adjust glasses, masks, and other personal attire is common and difficult in surgical situations. These inconveniences are not only time-consuming to correct, but also costly, with the accompanying distraction potentially increasing risk of surgical errors or complications.

## References

1. Orengo Ida, Salasche Stuart. Surgical Pearl: The cotton-tipped applicator – the ever-ready, multipurpose superstar. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 1994;31:658-60. [PMID: 8089294].
2. Neill BC, Tarantino IS, Rajpara A, Hocker TLH. Use of a cotton tip

## Discussion

The cotton tipped applicator is an inexpensive and multipurpose tool that may be used for a variety of simple surgical tasks and is readily available in clinical settings [1, 2]. We present an additional use — scratching an area on the surgeon's face without contaminating the surgical field. Cotton tipped applicators may also be used to scratch an itch on a patient's face or adjust the surgeon's glasses or mask. Additionally, this technique provides a solution if the surgeon has already gloved for surgery and forgot to turn on the surgical lights or electrocautery machine [1]. Sterile cotton tipped applicators may be placed on the instrument tray prior to surgery and quickly discarded after use without de-gloving. Material costs associated with cotton tipped applicators are much lower than the time or material costs associated with exiting the sterile field and de-gloving. Moreover, when surgical assistants are not present in the room this will enable the surgeon to focus more directly on the case. We have found cotton tipped applicators to be an efficient and inexpensive addition to the sterile field for our dermatological procedures.

## Potential conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

applicator for epidermal closures in dermatologic surgery, a video walkthrough. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2018;S0190-9622(18)32909-8. [PMID: 30458211].