



How to Treat Minor Cuts and Scrapes: Fact versus Fiction

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Minor cuts and scrapes on healthy individuals should heal most of the time, despite what you do. By comparison, persons who are compromised with chronic diseases such as diabetes, trauma such as spinal cord injury, or the frail elderly need every advantage possible to heal a wound. But sometimes the commonly used adhesive strips for minor wounds are just not enough to support healing. So where does that leave us?

Many of the current principles of wound care can apply to minor cuts and scrapes, and new and improved interactive dressings often result in improved healing times, less risk of infection and less scarring.

Fact Versus Fiction

Let's explore some basic principles and treatment strategies.

1. First, Stop the Bleeding

Fiction: *Nature will always clot the wound.*

Fact: *Direct pressure works best, and assists nature, to stop the blood flow and allow a clot to form.*

Yes, most wounds will form a clot and stop bleeding, but some wounds may need assistance to slow the bleeding and allow clotting to occur. By applying direct pressure to the wound site (using a piece of gauze), you can stop bleeding and support clot formation.

2. Cleanse the Wound

Fiction: *Sterilize the wound with an antiseptic.*

Fact: *Flush and cleanse the wound of all debris using a non-irritating substance, like a commercial wound cleanser or clean tap water.*

First, wash your hands. Use either a commercial wound cleanser or tap water to clean the wound. Ensure that the fluid you are using flushes the wound and is strong enough to loosen dirt and other foreign bodies but not so strong that it further damages the already damaged tissue. If you can't get a commercial wound cleaner, hold the wound under warm running tap water. Ensure your tap water is drinkable before using it on a wound.



3. Remove Dirt and Dead Skin

Fiction: Never touch the wound.

Fact: Cleaning the wound will help prevent infections and remove other barriers to healing.

If some of the dirt and debris remain after you have cleansed the wound, don't panic. Clean tweezers can be used to pick out small pieces of rock or glass or anything else that doesn't belong. To clean your tweezers before use, wash and rinse them thoroughly with soap and water. After use, wash them again thoroughly.

4. Bandage the Wound

Fiction: Let the air get at the wound to keep it dry.

Fact: Keeping the wound moist has many advantages.

Many wound bandages (dressings) on the market are referred to as "interactive" because they not only cover the wound but also promote healing. These dressings often seal (or occlude) the wound from the outside world, protecting it from injury and infection. These dressings help in the following ways:

- Interactive dressings prevent the wound from

drying out. By keeping the wound moist, they support an active wound-healing environment.

- A moist wound also reduces the chances that a crust or scab will form. If a scab forms and is ripped or picked off, the wound is re-injured and has to start healing all over again. The scab will also interfere with the healing as the body tries to dissolve the scab instead of healing the wound.
- Research has shown that moist wound healing is also associated with reduced infection rates. However, note that some interactive dressings that seal the wound should not be used in the presence of infection (see Signs and Symptoms of Infection on page 33).
- Specific dressing types can also regulate the level of moisture in a wound. Some dressings help keep the wound moist, some add moisture, while others absorb moisture drainage from the wound if there is too much.
- The right level and type of moisture can also help the body clean the wound of dead tissue in a process called "autolytic debridement." This is

Wound Dressing Categories

| Interactive Dressing Category | Characteristics | | | Don't Use If . . . | Brand Name(s) (ask your pharmacist) |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| | Occlusive | Moisture | Waterproof | | |
| Transparent adhesive film | Yes | Use if wound is moist. | Yes | There is lots of wound drainage or the wound is infected. | |
| Wound gel | Semi | Use if wound is dry. | No | There is lots of wound drainage. | |
| Hydrocolloid wafer | Yes | Use if there is moderate drainage. | Yes | The wound is infected. | |
| Foam | Some are and some are not. | Use if there is a lot of moisture. | Some are and some are not | The wound is dry. | |
| Antimicrobial | Some are and some are not. | It varies depending on the dressing. | Some are and some are not | It is not prescribed by health-care professional. | |

where the body's own enzymes break down dead tissue.

The bottom line is that, for most wounds, letting a scab form and airing out the wound are the wrong things to do. Both interfere with the body's ability to heal the wound.

If all is well, most dressings can be left on for five days (no peeking!). If the wound hasn't improved when you look at it after five days, or if at any time you notice any of the signs or symptoms of complications outlined on page 33, see a health-care professional.

How to Choose the Appropriate Interactive Dressings

Speak to your pharmacist about the types of dressings available for purchase and, on the wound dressings categories form (above), fill in the blank column on the right with the brand name.

Medicine Cabinet Supplies to Treat Cuts and Scrapes

- ♦ bag of 4-inch x 4-inch gauze
- ♦ tweezers
- ♦ wound cleanser
- ♦ interactive dressings
 - transparent adherent film dressings
 - gel dressings
 - hydrocolloid dressings
 - foam dressings
 - antimicrobial dressings
- ♦ medical tape
- ♦ 3-inch roll of self-adherent wrap to secure dressings in locations like fingers/toes, knees and elbows



When to Get Help

While most minor cuts can be treated at home, some require prompt medical attention. You should go to your doctor, clinic or local emergency room if the following occurs:


- The bleeding is heavy and/or can't be stopped.
- The wound is deep—that is, you can't see the bottom.
- There is a foreign object or debris in the wound that can't be flushed out.
- There is a lot of dead tissue in the wound.
- There is any loss of function—for example, you are unable to walk due to a foot injury, or you can't bend your finger.
- The wound was caused by an animal or a human bite.
- The wound is in or close to the eye.
- It is a puncture wound on the abdomen.
- The abrasion has removed a large area of skin.
- There are noticeable signs of infection (see below).

Signs and Symptoms of Infection

Infection is the hidden danger for any wound—no matter how minor. In fact, even under ideal conditions, 5% of simple hand wounds, for example, become infected, and antibiotics may be needed.¹ Seek medical assistance if you notice any of these warning signs:

- increasing pain or tenderness on or around the wound
- increasing redness and/or swelling
- a “warm” feeling at the wound site
- pus or thick, greenish wound fluid
- red streaks under the skin around the wound
- fever
- unpleasant odour

Summary

Cuts and scrapes are part of everyone's life. With a few simple steps, you can minimize the risk of infection and keep healing on track. 

Reference

1. Roodsari GS, Zahedi F, Zehtabchi S. The risk of wound infection after simple hand laceration. World J of Emerg Med. 2015;6(1):44–47.



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- Train and educate your health professionals
- Host patient information sessions
- Advocate to governments for improved care
- Support wound care research
- Provide skin and wound information via our website and social media

Find out more about us at www.WoundsCanada.ca.

