

# Cuts, scrapes & wounds first aid

You can usually take care of minor cuts and scrapes at home without seeing a doctor.

## Stop the bleeding

Put a clean cloth, dressing, towel or bandage on the wound, then press gently on it to apply pressure. It may take 20 to 30 minutes to stop it bleeding. Keep the pressure on the whole time and don't take it off to check what's happening.

If a hand or arm is bleeding, raise it above the level of the person's head to reduce the blood flow. If a leg is bleeding, lie the person down and raise their leg above the level of their heart.



If there's blood spurting that doesn't stop when you apply pressure or starts again when you remove the pressure after 20 to 30 minutes, seek medical help immediately.

## Clean the wound

When the wound has stopped bleeding, it's important to clean it to reduce the chance of it getting infected. To do this:

- wash and dry your hands well
- clean the wound under running tap water. Avoid using antiseptics as they can damage the skin
- dry the area by patting it gently with a clean towel or cloth.

## Cover the wound

Apply a sterile dressing such as a plaster.

Change the dressing as often as needed to keep it clean and dry. This gives you a chance to keep the area clean and to check the wound. Make sure you wash your hands before you change the dressing.



### When to seek medical help immediately

Seek medical help immediately if:

- You can't stop the bleeding.
- The person is bleeding from an artery. In this case, the blood will be bright red, spurting and usually hard to stop.
- The person has a severe cut on their face.
- The wound is large, deep or gaping and may need stitching. Small gaping wounds sometimes heal more quickly and leave better scars if they're stitched, glued or taped.

### When to seek medical help as soon as possible

Seek medical help as soon as possible if:

- The wound is on the palm of the person's hand and looks infected. These types of infection can spread quickly.
- The wound is dirty or there might be something in the wound like gravel, soil, glass or metal.
- It's an animal bite or puncture wound. For example, caused by standing on a nail.
- It's a skin tear, where the skin layers have separated and there's a flap of skin. These happen when the skin is thin and fragile and are most common on the arms and legs of older people. Don't cut off any flaps of loose skin. Skin tears can take a long time to heal so they need to be treated as soon as possible and monitored until they're healed.
- There are signs of infection, such as swelling, increasing redness or pain, pus or discharge in or around the wound or a bad smell. Feeling unwell or having a temperature are also signs of infection.
- The wounded person has a condition that could affect healing (such as diabetes or poor circulation), takes blood-thinning medicine such as warfarin, is an older person, has a suppressed immune system or is taking medicine that suppresses the immune system such as steroids.
- The wounded person isn't up to date with their tetanus immunisation. After the initial four childhood doses, the tetanus vaccine is given at ages 11, 45 and 65 years. But if the wound is large or dirty, it's best if you've had one within five years. If you aren't sure, call your practice nurse.

*Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed November 2019.*