First aid for cuts, scrapes & wounds

You can usually take care of minor cuts and scrapes at home without seeing a doctor. However, you need to take care to stop the wound becoming infected, and to help it heal quickly.

Stop the bleeding

Put a clean cloth 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.

Keep the area of the wound raised, if it is possible.

If there is blood spurting that does not 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 with tap water

This reduces the chance of the wound becoming infected.

Cover with a sterile, non-stick dressing

Change the dressing daily, and if it gets wet or dirty. 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.

Seek medical help as soon as possible if:

▪ the wound is large, deep or gaping and may need stitching (suturing). Small gaping wounds sometimes heal more quickly and leave better scars if they are stitched, glued or taped.
▪ the wound is dirty or there might be something in the wound, like gravel, soil, glass, metal.
▪ it is a puncture wound (for example, caused by standing on a nail) or animal bite.
▪ it is a skin tear, where the skin layers have separated and there is flap of skin. These happen when the skin is thin and fragile, and are most common on the arms and legs of older people. When they happen on the shin, they are called pretibial lacerations. Do not 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 are healed.
▪ there are signs of infection, such as increasing redness or pain, pus or discharge, a bad smell, or the wounded person feels unwell or has a temperature.
▪ the wounded person has a condition that could affect healing (such as diabetes or poor circulation); takes blood-thinning medication (anticoagulants or aspirin); is an older people; has a suppressed immune system or is taking medicine that suppresses the immune system, such as steroids.
▪ if the wounded person is not up to date with their tetanus immunisation. You should have a tetanus booster every 10 years, though if it is a large or dirty wound it's best if you've had one within five years. If you're not sure call your practice nurse.


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