



MINOR WOUND CARE BASICS

BY KRISTEN TEKIN

Minor scrapes and cuts are an expected part of an active lifestyle. However, an improperly cleaned and bandaged scrape can lead to complications such as scarring and infection. Rather than just slapping that adhesive bandage on after a minor injury, take the time to check these precautions off your list to be certain you are giving your wound the best possible chance for proper healing.

Clean it up

The first and most important rule is to clean the wound as much as possible and as soon as possible. There are a few points to remember in this first step:

1. Wash your hands. You know the drill! 20 seconds with soap and warm water so the five-fingered tools you are using to clean and dress your cut will not contaminate an otherwise cleaned wound.
2. Irrigate. Rinse the wound under water that is clean enough to safely drink. If any debris can still be seen in the cut, try using stronger water pressure if available. As a second option, you may use tweezers (sterilized by wiping with isopropyl alcohol) or sterile gauze to remove it.
3. Wash the wound. Using soap, gently clean the intact skin surrounding the wound. Rinse again

completely with water. Note that soap is the preferred agent for cleaning a skin abrasion due to the harsh irritation caused by other cleaning solutions such as hydrogen peroxide, iodine, or alcohol. These non-soap agents may increase the chance of scarring and otherwise delay healing.

4. Dry the wound. Pat the abrasion and surrounding skin dry – preferably with a sterile absorbent pad or clean cloth.

Stop the bleeding

If the wound continues to ooze blood, use the absorbent pad or cloth from the last step to hold gentle pressure directly on the cut. Bleeding should ideally be completely stopped before the next step. If the wound is on an arm or leg, raising it above the level of the heart while applying pressure will stop the bleeding more quickly.



Dress the wound

Small cuts can be left exposed to the air, but dressing the wound helps promote healing in the first few days after the injury. First, apply petroleum jelly. Petroleum jelly creates a great environment for new skin to form during the wound healing process. To cut down on contamination, petroleum jelly from a tube may be safer than from a tub-style container. Note that plain petroleum jelly is recommended by dermatologists over conventional antibiotic ointment. This is, again, due to concern for irritating the healing tissues with unnecessary added ingredients. Then, apply the adhesive bandage. This extra layer of protection is especially necessary if the wound is on an area prone to friction or becoming dirty such as on the hands, feet, legs, or forearms.

Keep it dry and clean

Remember to change the bandage every day until a scab has formed, which is usually in less than a week. When changing the bandage every day, wash each time with soap and water, pat dry, and reapply the petroleum jelly. Other than those times when you are changing the bandage, the wound area should remain dry. If the bandage becomes wet, wash and dry the area again or remove the bandage to uncover it so the soaked bandage does not become a trap for bacteria.

Defining minor wounds

Remember that this advice is only for common, superficial (shallow) skin wounds such as minor cuts, scrapes, or abrasions. These rules do not apply to all people or situations. For those who have a

bleeding disorder or are taking blood thinners, even minor cuts can pose major health risks. Similarly, if the cut or puncture wound was caused by an animal bite (even if by a beloved, vaccinated pet), you should seek care from a healthcare provider. Other situations that call for expert eyes on your wound include:

- If your wound is bleeding rapidly or you are unable to stop it
- If you feel that your sensation is damaged including numb or tingling feeling around the wound
- If your face is injured with a large cut – you may need to seek medical help to decrease the chances of complicated wound healing that leads to scarring
- If the cut shows signs of infection such as spreading redness, leaks discharge or has an odor
- If there is a possibility that foreign bodies remain inside the wound

These tips are essential first steps to caring for your minor wound. If your wound occurred while working, it is important to involve your manager so that they follow any necessary processes and that you are aware of any benefits for which you may qualify. For example, even if the wound is minor, you may need to create an incident report so that you may receive workers' compensation if your wound does not heal appropriately and you need to seek care down the road.

Resources:

1. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cuts-and-grazes/>
2. <https://www.ucihealth.org/blog/2018/10/wound-care>
3. <https://www.aad.org/public/everyday-care/injured-skin/burns/treat-minor-cuts>
4. <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2002/0715/p315.html>