

Wound Care Guidelines

- **Cuts** – accidental or intentional (such as surgery)
- **Scrapes** – abrasions
- **Punctures** – piercing object such as splinter, bites
- **Burns** – chemical, hot liquids, hot surface, or the sun

These are examples of types of wounds which cause damage to skin. Skin is the body's first line of defense against infection; thus if broken, germs can enter the body and an infection may develop.

First things first! First aid for cuts and scrapes

- **Stop the bleeding.** Bleeding can be cleansing and most small wounds will stop within minutes. To stop bleeding, apply firm yet gentle pressure with a clean cloth. If blood soaks through, add more cloth on top of what is already in place and continue with pressure. If blood spurts or continues to flow after several minutes of pressure then seek emergency assistance.
- **Wash your hands.** If your hands are not clean, you may spread germs into a new wound.
- **Clean wound.** The purpose is to decrease germs that may cause infection. Flush with clean water. Flush with more clean water! If debris remains then seek medical attention to aid in removal. Use soap, water, and clean cloth to cleanse surrounding skin. (most important step!)
- **Cover wound to keep it clean.** Ointments (optional) may discourage infection. Apply in thin layer and stop using if rash appears.
- **Change the dressing** daily or when it becomes wet or dirty.
- **Watch for signs of infection** and report these or any concerns to your health care provider: redness, excessive swelling, drainage, foul odor, an increase in pain or tenderness, red streaks, or fever, chills.
- **Check date of last tetanus shot.** As a routine, get a tetanus shot every ten years, however with some wounds it is recommended to take a tetanus shot if it has been more than five years since your last one. Check with your health care provider.

For Punctures - Puncture wounds may bleed little, however germs may have been carried deep inside. Bites, however small, should be assessed for infection potential, including rabies from certain animals. Contact your health care provider for all puncture wounds.

For Burns - First, stop the burn. For example, if contact with a hot liquid, then quickly remove clothing from the area of the hot liquid contact and flush with cool water. For sunburn, cover and do not re-expose to the sun. Use cold compresses for discomfort. See your health care provider if skin blisters, swells or oozes fluid.

Wounds requiring stitches - Any wound that gapes open or is longer than ½ inch should be evaluated as soon as possible or within six hours of injury. Infection may set in if care is delayed and suturing may not be possible. This may cause difficulty with healing, scarring and serious complications.

Call Dial-a-Nurse at 333-2700 for advice.

References

National Institute of Health
JAMA, October 26, 2005
2008 MayoClinic.com
2007 WebMD

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>