



Minor wound care

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Does my cut need stitches?

If your cut does not go all of the way through your skin, it does not need stitches. If your cut is wide, jagged, or does go all of the way through your skin, you will most likely need stitches.

If you are not sure if your cut needs stitches, check with your doctor or nurse. Sometimes, they will use special staples instead of stitches. They can also use a special type of skin glue to close certain cuts.

This article is about caring for minor wounds (like small cuts and scrapes) that do not need to be closed with stitches, staples, or skin glue. If you got stitches, staples, or glue, your doctor or nurse will tell you how to care for yourself.

What if I have a puncture wound?

A "puncture wound" is a cut that is made when a sharp object, like a nail, goes through the skin and into the tissue underneath. This type of wound can also be caused by animal or human bites. They are more likely to get infected than other minor wounds.

If you were bitten by an animal or human, see your doctor or nurse. Bite wounds need special care.

How do I take care of a minor wound on my own?

Follow these basic first aid guidelines:

- Clean the wound – Wash it well with soap and water. If there is dirt, glass, or another object in your cut that you can't get out after you wash it, call your doctor or nurse.
- Stop the bleeding – If your wound is bleeding, press a clean cloth or bandage firmly on the area for 20 minutes. You can also help slow the bleeding by holding the wound above the level of your heart, if possible. If the bleeding doesn't stop after 20 minutes, call your doctor or nurse.
- Put a thin layer of antibiotic ointment on the wound.
- Cover the wound with a bandage or gauze. Keep the bandage clean and dry. Change the bandage 1 to 2 times every day until your wound heals.
- Do not swim or soak your wound in water until it has healed. Ask your doctor or nurse if you have any questions.
- Each time you change the bandage, look at your skin to check for signs of infection. These include redness that is getting worse or spreading, swelling, or warmth in the area. You might see some thin clear or yellow fluid as the wound heals, which is normal.
- Most minor wounds heal on their own within 7 to 10 days. As your wound heals, a scab will form. Do not pick at the scab or scratch the skin around it.

When should I call the doctor or nurse?

Call the doctor or nurse if you have any signs of an infection. These include:

- Fever
 - Redness, swelling, warmth, or increased pain around the wound
 - A bad smell coming from the wound
 - Pus (thick yellow, green, or gray fluid) draining from the wound
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Will I need a tetanus shot?

Maybe. It depends on how old you are, type of the wound, dirty or not, and when your last tetanus shot was. Tetanus is a serious infection that can cause muscle stiffness and spasms, and even lead to death. It is caused by bacteria (germs) that live in the dirt.

Most children get a tetanus vaccine as part of their routine check-ups. Vaccines can prevent certain serious or deadly infections. Many adults also get a tetanus vaccine as part of their routine check-ups. Getting all of your vaccines is important, since it's possible to get tetanus even from a small wound.

If your skin is cut or punctured, and especially if the cut is dirty or deep, ask your doctor or nurse if you need a tetanus shot.

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