

Wound Care

How should I clean a wound at home?

Hold the wound under warm tap water. Use soap and a soft washcloth to clean the skin around it. Try to keep soap out of the wound. Ask your doctor if you should use anything other than soap and water, because some disinfectants (such as hydrogen peroxide or iodine) may slow down the healing process.

How should I stop the bleeding?

Apply firm but gentle pressure to the wound with a clean cloth, gauze, or bandage for up to 30 minutes. If possible, raise the wound above the level of the heart.

Should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if the wound is deep, if you can't get the edges to stay together, or if the edges are jagged. Your doctor may want to close the wound with stitches or skin adhesive. You should also call your doctor if you see any signs of infection, such as:

- Pain that gets worse
- Redness or swelling
- Warm skin around the wound
- A bad odor coming from the wound after it has been cleaned

- A change in the color or amount of drainage from the wound
- Fever, chills, nausea, or vomiting

Do I need a tetanus shot?

You can get a tetanus infection whenever you have a break in the skin. You may have gotten tetanus shots as a child, with periodic booster shots. If you have a minor wound that is clean, you may need a tetanus shot if you have not had a booster shot in the past 10 years. If your wound is more serious, you may need a shot if you have not had one in the past five years. Ask your doctor to make sure your other shots are up to date.

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Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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