

Tips to Help Wounds Heal

A slip with a kitchen knife, a spill off a bike or a fall on the sidewalk. It's not uncommon to have a mishap that injures the skin. When a wound occurs, there are simple steps you can take at home to help speed healing. Experts offer these tips on wound care in the December 2005 issue of Mayo Clinic Women's HealthSource:

COVER THE WOUND

... with a sterile dressing and apply pressure to stop the bleeding.

CLEAN THE WOUND

... with tap or bottled water or sterile saline. Seek medical treatment if you need stitches, can't clean the wound or if it was caused by animal or human bite. Also, seek medical attention if it has been 10 years or longer since you had a tetanus shot.

APPLY A TOPICAL ANTIBIOTIC OINTMENT.

Create a barrier to keep the wound moist by applying a heavy lubricant such as Vaseline or Aquaphor. Don't use betadine, alcohol or hydrogen peroxide because these harsh chemicals interfere with healing.

COVER THE WOUND WITH A STERILE DRESSING TO CREATE A WARM, MOIST ENVIRONMENT

—the best condition for wound healing. This differs from past recommendations to leave the wound open to air. Experts now find that a protected, moist environment decreases pain, infection and the likelihood of reinjury.

APPLY A DRESSING THAT KEEPS THE WOUND MOIST AND THE SURROUNDING TISSUE DRY.

Use a nonstick dressing and gently change it every day or two. Try to keep a wet scab intact. Wounds should normally stay covered for five days or until the surface layers have healed. Don't use plain gauze because it can stick to the scab and cause re-injury when removed.

DON'T SCRATCH.

Itching is normal to the healing process and scratching may reopen the wound.

EAT RIGHT AND DON'T SMOKE.

This will promote healing.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF THE WOUND DEVELOPS SIGNS OF INFECTION

... including redness, increased pain or swelling or a yellow or green discharge.

Source: Mayo Clinic news release.

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