

**Minor cuts and scrapes usually don't require a trip to the emergency room. Yet proper care is essential to avoid infection or other complications.**

**These guidelines can help you care for simple wounds:**

Stop the bleeding. Minor cuts and scrapes usually stop bleeding on their own. If they don't, apply gentle pressure with a clean cloth or bandage. Hold the pressure continuously for 20 to 30 minutes and if possible elevate the wound. Don't keep checking to see if the bleeding has stopped because this may damage or dislodge the clot that's forming and cause bleeding to resume. If blood spurts or continues flowing after continuous pressure, seek medical assistance.

Clean the wound. Rinse out the wound with clear water. Soap can irritate the wound, so try to keep it out of the actual wound. If dirt or debris remains in the wound after washing, use tweezers cleaned with alcohol to remove the particles. If debris still remains, see your doctor. Thorough cleaning reduces the risk of infection and tetanus. To clean the area around the wound, use soap and a washcloth. There's no need to use hydrogen peroxide, iodine or an iodine-containing cleanser.

Apply an antibiotic. After you clean the wound, apply a thin layer of an antibiotic cream or ointment such as Neosporin or Polysporin to help keep the surface moist. The products don't make the wound heal faster, but they can discourage infection and help your body's natural healing process. Certain ingredients in some ointments can cause a mild rash in some people. If a rash appears, stop using the ointment.

Cover the wound. Bandages can help keep the wound clean and keep harmful bacteria out. After the wound has healed enough to make infection unlikely, exposure to the air will speed wound healing.

Change the dressing. Change the dressing at least daily or whenever it becomes wet or dirty. If you're allergic to the adhesive used in most bandages, switch to adhesive-free dressings or sterile gauze held in place with paper tape, gauze roll or a loosely applied elastic bandage. These supplies generally are available at pharmacies.

Get stitches for deep wounds. A wound that is more than 1/4-inch (6 millimeters) deep or is gaping or jagged edged and has fat or muscle protruding usually requires stitches. Adhesive strips or butterfly tape may hold a minor cut together, but if you can't easily close the wound, see your doctor as soon as possible. Proper closure within a few hours reduces the risk of infection.

Watch for signs of infection. See your doctor if the wound isn't healing or you notice any redness, increasing pain, drainage, warmth or swelling.

Get a tetanus shot. Doctors recommend you get a tetanus shot every 10 years. If your wound is deep or dirty and your last shot was more than five years ago, your doctor may recommend a tetanus shot booster. Get the booster as soon as possible after the injury.

From: The Mayo Clinic <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/first-aid-cuts/FA00042>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/first-aid-cuts/FA00042>