

Disaster Relief

How to Care for Minor and Major Open Wounds



Minor wound: A minor wound, such as a scrape, means there is only a little bleeding and the wound is on the surface. Mild bleeding can always be stopped within 15 minutes by direct pressure to the wound.

- Put on disposable gloves.
- Use soap and water to clean the area thoroughly.
- Place a clean (sterile) dressing over the wound.
- Apply direct pressure to the site to control any blood flow.
- Remove the dressing, and apply antibiotic ointment after the blood stops.
- Apply a new dressing (gauze pad with tape or a band-aid).
- Dispose of gloves properly, and wash your hands with soap and water.

Stitches: It is difficult to judge sometimes when a wound may require stitches. Generally, stitches are needed when the edges of the skin do not fall neatly together, when a wound is more than an inch long, or when a wound is particularly deep. Stitches should be applied within the first few hours to eliminate the chances of infection and scarring.

Major wound: A major wound has severe bleeding, a deeply embedded object, or deep destruction of the tissue. Severe bleeding means you cannot slow or stop the blood after applying steady, direct pressure to the wound for 15 minutes.

- Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number.
- Put on disposable gloves.
- Control bleeding:
 - Cover wound with dressing and press firmly against the wound;
 - Elevate the injured area above the level of the heart, if you suspect no broken bones;
 - Apply a pressure bandage over the dressing to keep pressure on the wound;

- If blood soaks through, do not remove blood-soaked bandages; add more pads and bandages to help absorb blood; and
- Apply pressure and bandages to help absorb the blood.
- Monitor airway and breathing. Watch whether the victim is breathing faster or slower, and watch for changes in skin color, restlessness, and a look of anxiousness.
- Keep the victim from getting cold or overheated.
- Reassure the victim and help him or her rest comfortably.
- Dispose of gloves properly, and wash hands with soap and water.

If a body part has been severed:

- Put on disposable gloves.
- Wrap the body part in sterile gauze or any clean material.
- Place the wrapped part in a bag, and put on ice.
- Do not put the bag on dry ice or in ice water.
- Make sure the body part follows the victim to the medical facility.

If there is an object in the wound:

- Put on disposable gloves.
- Do not remove the object.
- Use some sort of bulky dressing to stabilize the object and avoid further tissue damage.
- Dispose of gloves properly, and wash hands with soap and water.

Note: Always put on disposable gloves for any type of wound treatment to prevent infection. Tetanus is a threat for any type of wound injury. Make sure tetanus immunization is current (boosters are given every 5 to 10 years).

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