



## Dartmouth College Health Service

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# WOUND CARE INSTRUCTIONS

**Wounds have less chance of becoming infected and progress through the healing process faster if they are kept clean, moist with ointment or gel and bandaged.** DO NOT use hydrogen peroxide or rubbing alcohol to clean your wound. These products will damage healthy cells.

**DO NOT allow scabs to form.** Scabs can delay healing.

**IMPORTANT: If your wound shows any redness, warmth, swelling, increased soreness, pus or red streaks, or if you develop a temperature over 100°F (38°C), contact your provider.** Once your wound is healed, you should use generous amounts of sunscreen with a SPF 30 or higher. Newly healed skin is more prone to sunburn, which may result in blistering and delayed healing.

Will I have a scar?

Several factors affect scar formation: heredity, depth and width of wound or delayed healing. Some people are prone to developing thick, bulky scars known as keloid, while others may develop scars that are either light or dark in color. Scar formation can be minimized, and cosmetic results improved if we provide a balanced/healthy environment for cells to repair the wound.

Do I need a tetanus shot?

You can get tetanus whenever you have a break in the skin. This infection is also known as lockjaw because stiffness of the jaw is the most frequent symptom.

You should have received a series of three tetanus injections as an infant, with periodic boosters. When a wound is clean and minor, you may need a shot in the form of a Tdap if you have not had a shot in 10 years. When the wound is more serious, if you have not had a shot in the last five years, you may need a Tdap. Talk to your health care provider to make sure your immunizations are up to date.

## Self-care of Burns and Abrasions (Scrapes)

Keep the bandage(s) dry between changes.

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Clean wound(s) with a soapy washcloth. You may do this in the shower. (Permanent tattooing can occur if all dirt or asphalt is not totally removed from injured skin.)
3. Dry wound(s) gently with a clean towel.

4. Apply antibiotic ointment to wound(s).
5. Apply a dry, clean bandage.

### **Self-care of Facial Abrasions (Scrapes)**

Wear a hat to protect your face from the sun. You may not need to wear a bandage if you maintain a regular wound-cleansing schedule.

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Use a clean, warm soapy washcloth to remove all dried drainage.
3. Pat dry gently.
4. Apply a thin layer of antibiotic ointment after each cleansing.
5. Repeat steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 three to four times per day, especially for the first five to six days.

### **Self-care of Sutured Site**

**If your wound was stitched and bandaged, keep the bandage dry for the first 24 hours.** DO NOT allow scabbing to form on the stitched site. Scabs can delay healing.

Keep the bandage dry between changes. Your stitches will be removed after a predetermined amount of time. If you had a biopsy procedure done, the results will be discussed with you on a return visit.

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Clean wound with soap and water. You may do this in the shower. Do not soak in a bathtub or go swimming.
3. Dry wound gently with a clean towel.
4. Apply antibiotic ointment to wound.
5. Apply a dry, clean bandage.

### **Cryosurgery (Liquid Nitrogen Freezing)**

Liquid nitrogen is used to freeze skin lesions. When it is first applied, the skin appears pale; as it thaws, you may feel a burning sensation or pain for up to 24 hours. Cool compresses can help relieve discomfort.

In one to two days, you can expect the treated area to become red, slightly swollen and moist, and a fluid or blood-filled blister may develop at the site. Do not open the blister should one appear. The blister will dry, forming a scab.

Mild redness and soreness are expected at treated site. However, if you develop increased redness, warmth, swelling, increased soreness, pus or red streaks, or if you develop a temperature over 100°F (38°C), contact your provider.

Complete healing may take two to three weeks with a whitish scar. This discoloration may disappear in a few months.

#### Self-care of Treated Site

DO NOT open or pull off blistered or crusted skin.

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Clean the treated site(s) with soap and water.
3. Rinse, and pat dry gently.
4. You may apply Bacitracin ointment on blister(s). Remember: DO NOT open or pull off blistered or crusted skin.
5. You may cover the treated site(s) with a loosely applied bandage or dry gauze.