

Cuts and Scrapes

Definition

- Cut or scrape injuries to the skin anywhere on the body

Health Information

Types

- Cuts, lacerations, gashes and tears. These are wounds that go through the skin to the fat tissue.
- Scrapes, abrasions, scratches and floor burns. These are surface wounds that scrape off the top layer of skin. They don't go all the way through the skin. Scrapes are common on the knees, elbows and palms.

Symptoms

- The main symptom is some bleeding.
- Cuts and scrapes are also painful.

When Sutures (stitches) are Needed for Cuts

- Any cut that is split open or gaping needs sutures.
- Cuts longer than ½ inch (12 mm) usually need sutures.
- On the face, cuts longer than ¼ inch (6 mm) usually need to be seen. They usually need closure with sutures or skin glue.
- Any open wound that may need sutures should be seen as soon as possible. Ideally, they should be checked and closed within 6 hours. Reason: To prevent wound infections. There is no cutoff, however, for treating open wounds.

Cuts Versus Scratches: Helping You Decide

- The skin is about 1/8 inch (3 mm) thick.
- A cut (laceration) goes through it.
- A scratch or scrape (wide scratch) doesn't go through the skin.
- Cuts that gape open at rest or with movement need stitches to prevent scarring.
- Scrapes and scratches never need stitches, no matter how long they are.
- So this distinction is important.

Prevention

- Careful adult supervision of young children
- Education of older children about high risk behaviors

Care Advice

1. Cuts, Scratches and Scrapes:

- Use direct pressure to stop any bleeding. Do this for 10 minutes or until the bleeding stops.
- Wash the wound with soap and water for 5 minutes. Try to rinse the cut under running water.
- Caution: Never soak a wound that might need sutures. Reason: It may become more swollen and harder to close.
- Gently wash out any dirt with a washcloth.

2. **Antibiotic Ointment:**

- Put an antibiotic ointment on such as Polysporin. No prescription is needed.
- Then, cover it with a Band-Aid or dressing. Change daily.

3. **Liquid Skin Bandage for Minor Cuts and Scrapes:**

- Liquid skin bandage seals wounds with a plastic coating. It lasts up to 1 week.
- Use for any small break in the skin. Examples are paper cuts, hangnails, and cracks on the fingers or toes.
- Liquid skin bandage has several benefits compared to other bandages (such as Band-Aid). Liquid bandage only needs to be put on once. It seals the wound and may promote faster healing and lower infection rates. Also, it's water-proof, so you can bathe or shower.
- Wash and dry the wound first. Then, put on the liquid. It comes with a small brush. It dries in less than a minute.
- You can get this product at a drugstore near you. There are many brands of liquid bandage. No prescription is needed. The store brand of this product costs less than 5 dollars.

4. **Pain Medicine:**

- To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.

5. **Tetanus Shot:**

- A tetanus shot update may be needed for cuts and other open wounds.
- Check your vaccine records to see when your child got the last one.
- For Dirty Cuts and Scrapes. If last tetanus shot was given over 5 years ago, need a booster.
- For Clean Cuts. If last tetanus shot was given over 10 years ago, need a booster.
- See your child's doctor for a booster during regular office hours. It's safe to give it within 3 days or less.

6. **What to Expect:**

- Small cuts, scratches, and scrapes should heal in about a week.
- It may take a week or two longer for them to fully disappear.

Call Your Doctor If

- Pain becomes severe
- Starts to look infected (pus, redness)
- Doesn't heal by 10 days
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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