



Scars and Wounds

A wound is a physical injury to the body that causes damage to the structure of the area injured. The wound may be under the skin, may affect only the skin surface, or might affect the skin surface and beneath it.

Types of wounds include an incision (cut) from surgery, a laceration (cut) from a sharp object, or a bruise, tear, fracture or other injury that is under the skin, in a muscle or tendon, or on a bone or organ. A wound can be caused by a medical procedure, fall or accident, tumor growth, or pressure on bony areas. Proper care for a wound is important to protect it from infection and help it heal.

Scars form as wounds to the skin heal. They are a natural part of the healing process as the body mends damage from skin that has been cut. The new tissue formed by a scar will have a different feel and texture than the skin around it.

Let your cancer care team know if you notice any wounds so they can be cared for promptly.

What to look for

- Redness or purple bruising of skin
- Scaly, broken skin
- Crusts, scabs, or cuts in the skin
- Bleeding
- Swelling
- Drainage or pus
- Warmth or heat at the affected area
- [Pain](#)¹ or tenderness

What the patient can do

- Wash your hands well before and after changing a wound dressing. Never re-use dressings.
- Always keep the wound clean. Unless you were given different instructions, clean the wound every day with soap and water, rinse well, and pat it dry with a clean towel.
- Dress wounds as instructed, or use sterile, non-stick gauze. Use paper tape if you can.
- Keep your dressing clean and dry. If it gets wet or dirty, change it right away.
- If the wound is bleeding, clean it well and apply moderate pressure with a cool cloth or ice pack until the bleeding stops. Then continue with the dressing change.
- Try not to put tape right on the skin. Use a “skin prep” solution to protect skin where the tape goes, or wrap gauze over the bandage and then tape the gauze. Check with your nurse or pharmacist about supplies.
- Only use wound dressings, skin prep solutions, tapes, and other supplies approved by your care team.
- If you have any medications prescribed, such as antibiotics, take them as instructed
- Avoid scratching or rubbing the wound. Don't remove scabs.
- Eat citrus fruits, green leafy vegetables, whole grains, meat, fish, and eggs. They contain protein, vitamins, and minerals that help promote wound healing.
- Let your doctor know if your wound is painful. He or she might be able to order some pain medicine to help with the pain.

What caregivers can do

- Help clean wounds or change dressings if the patient can't do it alone. If you can, wear a fresh pair of disposable plastic gloves each time you clean the area and put on a new dressing. Wash your hands before and after changing a dressing, even if you wear gloves.
- Be sure the patient has enough supplies to change the dressing as often as instructed.
- Check for signs of [infection](#)² (redness, swelling, tenderness, drainage or pus).

Call the cancer care team if the patient

- Has a wound that bleeds for a long time and doesn't stop when pressure is applied
- Has a wound that looks very red around the edges and is hot or swollen
- Has more pain than usual at the wound site
- Has a bad smell coming from the wound
- Has yellow pus or greenish liquid that oozes from the wound
- Has any changes in the skin around the wound
- Has a [fever](#)³ (your cancer care team will let you know what they consider a fever)

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/pain.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/low-blood-counts/infections.html
3. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/low-blood-counts/fever.html

References

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