

Proper Wound Care Speeds Healing

Our skin protects our bodies from exposure to infection. When the skin is broken or cut, proper healing is essential to a full recovery. Otherwise, the wound is at risk of infection.

"I never realized that a center would have such a specialized process for healing wounds. I am so grateful for this place. The people here were extremely knowledgeable and so up-to-date on the newest and best options for healing me."

Tony G., Post-Surgical Short Term Rehab

Proper healing also prevents the possible loss of function that can result from damage to the nerves, muscle, tendons, bones, or arteries.

There are many different types of wounds, and the overall

health of the individual involved plays a significant role in the healing process. Certain medical conditions can impact the speed with which wounds heal, or create a greater risk of complications. Some wounds may not heal, and will require constant attention to ensure that the wound is properly managed.

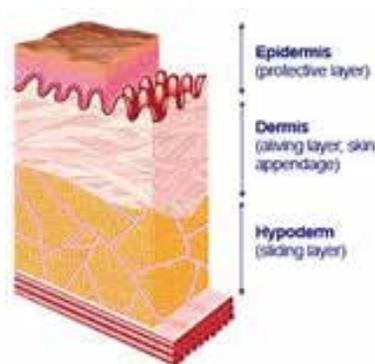
Whether wounds are treated in a physician's office, at a hospital, in a rehabilitation center, or a skilled nursing facility, the key to successful wound management is access to professional staff trained in the latest methods of treatment, and adherence to strict protocol in wound management. The meticulous attention to care offered by the IMG Team promotes quick and effective healing for all patients.

A Word About Our Skin

Our skin is made up of two layers: The epidermis and the dermis.

The epidermis is the outer layer of skin. It can be seen by the naked eye. It is exposed to air and light, and actively forms and sheds skin cells.

The dermis is underneath the epidermis and has two layers. The papillary dermis, a thin layer of tissue that contains blood vessels and collagen fibers, sits just under the epidermis. Underneath that layer is the reticular dermis, which contains elastic fibers and bundles of collagen that aids the skin in resisting injury, and recovering from



stretching or compression. Hair follicles, sweat glands, and sebaceous glands are all found in this layer.

The level of skin that is penetrated by a wound impacts the type of wound care a patient requires.

Risk Factors

While most wounds heal without complications, certain conditions do impact the speed and success of the healing process. For example, healing in the elderly is more difficult because of the degeneration of the skin, a natural result of aging. In addition, these medical conditions may negatively impact the healing process:

- Endocrine disorders, such as diabetes and hypothyroidism.
- Hematologic conditions, including anemia, polycythemia, and myeloproliferative disorders.
- Cardiopulmonary problems, for example, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and congestive heart failure.
- Gastrointestinal (GI) problems that cause malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies.
- Obesity.
- Peripheral vascular conditions, such as atherosclerotic disease, chronic venous insufficiency, and lymphedema.

"An individualized, holistically-centered approach is used for patient care," said Shari Bellinger, RN, the IMG Director of Clinical Services for the Northwest Region of Indiana. "We consider the wound the patient is being treated for, as well as factors that may affect their well-being, including the social, psychological, physical, nutritional, and lifestyle aspects."

She said patient education is also a concern. "In addition to wound assessment and treatment, patient education must be taken into account," Bellinger said. "Overlooking any of these areas may prevent the patient from understanding and complying with instructions related to wound care. That puts them at risk for a non-healing, chronic wound."

When Wound Care Is Necessary

Generally, medical treatment should be sought when:

- ✓ Significant bleeding results from a car, industrial, or home accident.
- ✓ A wound is more than ½ inch deep.
- ✓ The wound bleeds for more than 20 minutes.
- ✓ Direct pressure applied to the wound does not stop bleeding.
- ✓ An open sore fails to heal.

Proper treatment of a wound is dictated by the nature and degree of the injury or wound. After a wound is cleaned and if necessary, treated with an anesthetic, it may be closed using stitches, skin glue, or sutures. The patient may also receive a tetanus booster shot or pain medication. In addition, if there is a high risk of infection, an antibiotic will be prescribed. When a wound cannot be closed, a bandage or dressing may be applied.

If a body part is severed, it should be wrapped in a clean, moist cloth and packed in ice, and brought to the hospital for possible reattachment. When surgery is required to repair and injury or close a wound, it will be scheduled immediately.

Some wounds may require more focused care:

- **Surgical incisions.** During surgery or a medical procedure, incisions are made through the skin. Generally, these openings are small and unobtrusive, and that facilitates proper healing. After surgery, wound care is designed to prevent infection at the site of the surgical incision.
- **Amputation.** An amputation involves the surgical removal of all or part of a limb or extremity, such as an arm, leg, foot, hand, toe, or finger. Removal of the leg, above or below the knee, is the most common type of amputation. Generally, this occurs when peripheral arterial disease, or the narrowing of the arteries, causes poor blood circulation in the leg. Without adequate blood flow, the body's cells cannot get oxygen and the nutrients required from the bloodstream. The affected tissue begins to die and infection sets in. After surgery, the goal of wound care is to heal any underlying soft tissue and reduce the risk of infection.
- **Diabetic ulcers.** Elevated blood sugar levels, or diabetes, can damage nerves in the foot, toe, or heel of the foot. When ulcers or open wounds occur, they may not be discovered because the patient cannot feel pain in those areas. In addition, poor circulation, or reduced blood flow to the feet, impairs healing. Wound management focuses on the prevention of infection, taking pressure off of the wound, removing dead skin and tissue, applying medication or dressings to the ulcer, and/or monitoring blood glucose levels. If tissue damage results, amputation may become necessary.
- **Venous stasis ulcers.** Poor blood circulation in the legs can also result in ulcers on the lower leg or ankle. If the ulcers are not cared for properly, they may become crippling or chronic. Wound management emphasizes compression therapy, removal of dead skin and tissue, dressings, oral or topical antibiotics, surgery, or physical therapy.
- **Pressure wounds/pressure ulcers.** When there is a loss in the thickness of the skin, unrelieved pressure may result in wounds or ulcers, sometimes called bed sores. Pressure on the skin reduces the flow of blood to area under pressure, and deep tissue death may occur. While there is sometimes a change in the color of the

affected skin, areas of deep tissue death may not be discovered until open wounds appear. Proper wound care involves the reduction of pressure on the affected area of skin, removal of dead skin or tissue, infection control, dressings, and surgery.

- **Chronic wounds.** A chronic wound heals very slowly or not at all. It may also reoccur repeatedly. Typically, wounds that do not heal within three months are considered chronic wounds. Due to a serious risk of infection and the resulting complications, ongoing, professional care of such wounds is vital to the well-being of the patient. Negative pressure wound therapy is often used to manage chronic wounds. In this procedure, sub-atmospheric pressure is applied to a wound using a sealed wound dressing connected to a vacuum pump. This enhances healing, particularly for second and third-degree burns, and certain types of ulcers.

Healing

The end goal of wound care is healing.

All patients receive specific instructions about proper care of a wound. But in all cases, it is vital that a wound be kept clean.

Bandages should remain in place for at least 24 hours or longer if instructed. Bandages or dressings should be changed with clean hands and on a disinfected, dry surface. The wound should be disinfected and dried thoroughly before applying a clean bandage or dressing. All old dressings and bandages should be disposed of in a plastic bag.

Applying a layer of moisture to a clean wound, such as Vaseline, Aquaphor, or an antibiotic ointment, minimizes scarring and enhances healing. However, immersing a wound in a pool, hot-tub, bath, or pool before sutures are removed could result in infection.

In addition to overall health and the existence of certain medical conditions, a number of factors may slow or impair the healing process. Some factors, such as age and hormonal activity, cannot be modified. However, other roadblocks are manageable, including stress, diet, weight, use of alcohol, smoking, mobility and failure to expose a wound to air (oxygenation).

Elderly patients and their families must be particularly vigilant about wound care. Age impacts whether or how well a wound heals. Careful attention must be paid to keeping the wound moist, the possibility of infection, evidence of dead skin around the wound, and excessive bleeding. In addition, a healthy diet, and mobility should be encouraged.

Conclusion

Wounds can have a significant impact on overall health, and for that reason, it is important that all are managed with care. The IMG Team works with patients to ensure that wounds heal quickly and without complications.



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