

### Taking care of cuts and scrapes

**Does my cut need stitches?** — If your cut does not go all the way through the skin, it does not need stitches. If your cut is wide, jagged, or does go all the way through the skin, you will most likely need stitches. If you are unsure if your cut needs stitches, check with your doctor or nurse.

This article discusses cuts and scrapes that do not need stitches.

**How do I take care of a cut or scrape on my own?** — To take care of your cut or scrape, follow these basic first aid guidelines:

- Clean the cut or scrape — Wash it well with soap and water. If there is dirt, glass, or another object in your cut that you can't get out after you wash it, call your doctor or nurse.
- Stop the bleeding — If your cut or scrape is bleeding, press a clean cloth or bandage firmly on the area for 20 minutes. You can also help slow the bleeding by holding the cut above the level of your heart. If the bleeding doesn't stop after 20 minutes, call your doctor or nurse.
- Put a thin layer of antibiotic ointment on the cut or scrape.
- Cover the cut or scrape with a bandage or gauze. Keep the bandage clean and dry. Change the bandage 1 to 2 times every day until your cut or scrape heals.
- Watch for signs that your cut or scrape is infected (see below).

Most cuts and scrapes heal on their own within 7 to 10 days. As your cut or scrape heals, a scab will form. Be sure to leave the scab alone and not pick at it.

**When should I call the doctor or nurse?** — Call the doctor or nurse if you have any signs of an infection. Signs of an infection include:

- Fever
- Redness, swelling, warmth, or increased pain around the cut or scrape
- Pus draining from the cut or scrape
- Red streaks on the skin around the cut or scrape

Cuts called "puncture wounds" have a higher chance of getting infected. A puncture wound is a type of cut that is made when a sharp object goes through the skin and into the tissue underneath.

**Will I need a tetanus shot?** — Maybe. It depends on how old you are and when your last tetanus shot was. Tetanus is a serious infection that can cause muscle stiffness and spasms. It is caused by bacteria (germs) that live in the dirt.

Most children get a tetanus vaccine as part of their routine check-ups. Vaccines are treatments (usually shots) that can prevent certain serious or deadly infections. Many adults also get a tetanus vaccine as part of their routine check-ups.

If your skin is cut, and especially if the cut is dirty or deep, ask your doctor or nurse if you need a tetanus shot.

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### Taking care of bruises

**What are bruises?** — Bruises happen when blood vessels under the skin break, but the skin isn't cut. Blood leaks into the tissues under the skin. Bruises start off red in color, and then turn blue or purple. As they heal, bruises can turn green and yellow. Most bruises heal in 1 to 2 weeks, but some take longer.

Bruises can happen when people get hurt, fall, or bump themselves. People usually have pain and swelling in the area of the bruise. Sometimes, the swelling happens right away. Other times, the swelling starts 1 or 2 days later.

Some people bruise more easily and get worse bruises. These include people who have conditions that keep the blood from clotting normally and people who take medicines to prevent blood clots.

**How are bruises treated?** — A bruise will get better on its own. But to feel better and help your bruise heal, you can:

- Put a cold gel pack, bag of ice, or bag of frozen vegetables on the injured area every 1 to 2 hours, for 15 minutes each time. Put a thin towel between the ice (or other cold object) and your skin. Use the ice (or other cold object) for at least 6 hours after your injury. Some people find it helpful to ice longer, even up to 2 days after their injury.
- Raise the area, if possible — Raising the area above the level of your heart helps to reduce swelling.
- Take medicine to reduce the pain and swelling — To treat pain, you can take acetaminophen (sample brand name: Tylenol). To treat pain and swelling, you can take ibuprofen (sample brand names: Advil, Motrin). But people who have certain conditions or take certain medicines should not take ibuprofen. If you are unsure, ask your doctor or nurse if you can take ibuprofen.

You should NOT:

- Put a warm pack or heating pad on your bruise
- Stick a needle or other object in your bruise to drain it

**When should I call the doctor or nurse?** — Call your doctor or nurse if:

- You get a fever
- Your bruise causes your joints to swell
- You can't move or walk because of your bruise
- You get bruises for no reason or have unusual bleeding, such as from your gums or in your urine

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