

Understanding Your Hard to Heal Wound

Information for patients

Dressings, management, and wound infection

In this leaflet, Health Care Professional (HCP) refers to any member of the team involved in your wound care. This can include treatment room or practice nurse, community, ward or clinic nurse, GP or hospital doctor, podiatrist, etc.

Hard to Heal Wounds and Dressings

What is a hard to heal wound?

A hard to heal wound is any wound which makes slow progress towards healing or shows delayed healing. This may be due to underlying issues such as:

- Poor blood flow and less oxygen getting to the wound.
- Poor diet, smoking, pressure on the wound, e.g., footwear/seating.
- Other health conditions.

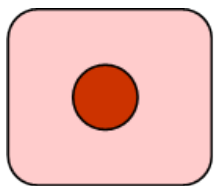
Can my wound be left to the open air?

No. The evidence shows that wounds heal better when the surface is kept moist (not too wet or dry). The moisture provides the correct environment to aid your wound in healing.

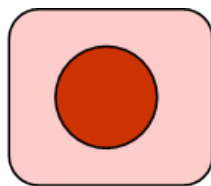
Does my dressing need to be changed daily?

No. How often your dressing is changed will depend on the level of fluid leaking from your wound. Some dressings can be left in place for up to a week. If a dressing is changed too often this can stall the healing process and increase exposure to bacteria.

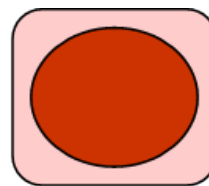
Your dressing may indicate that it needs changed when the dark area in the centre gets close to the edge of the dressing's pad. The dark area is fluid from your wound, this is normal. It will be dry to touch. Let your HCP know if your dressing needs changed before your next visit or appointment is due.



Do not
change
dressing



Do not
change
dressing



Change
the
dressing

Does my wound need to be cleaned when the dressing is changed?

Yes. Regular cleaning of your wound is essential to prevent build-up of bacteria and waste products (slough) which can delay wound healing. Your wound may require more thorough cleaning to remove slough that has built-up; this is known as debridement. The surrounding skin will also be cleaned, especially if you have been in bandages. Occasionally, if dressings stick, they may be soaked off.

Can I shower or have a bath with a dressing on?

Some dressings are water-resistant and will be safe to wear in the shower. Soaking a dressing, such as in the bath, will cause it to fall off. Always check with your HCP first as a waterproof cover may be required to keep dressings dry.

What do I do if my dressing falls off?

Your HCP will explain what to do if this happens. They may give you spare dressings which you or a family member/carer can apply.

Always wash your hands **before and after** doing anything with your wound to reduce the risk of infection.

Wound Infection and Antimicrobial Dressings

How can I tell if my wound is infected?

Most wounds have a slight odour, but if a wound smells bad after it has been cleaned, it could be a sign that something is wrong. If your wound shows one or more of the following signs, then this may indicate an infection:

- Increased swelling around the wound.
- A change in colour of the skin around the wound.
- Pain from the wound is getting worse.
- Skin around the wound feels hot to the touch.
- There is more fluid leaking from the wound than normal.
- Wound fluid is green, thick, cloudy, foul-smelling.

Some conditions will make you more likely to develop a wound infection, e.g., Diabetes, poor circulation, etc.

Will I need an antibiotic?

Not all wound infections will require antibiotic treatment. Your doctor/GP or other HCP will make this decision based on your symptoms and sometimes they may take a swab of your wound.

Your HCP may decide to use a specialist wound cleansing product or an antimicrobial wound dressing to reduce the level of bacteria instead of, or as well as, antibiotics.

What is an antimicrobial wound dressing?

Antimicrobials are agents that kill or stop the spread of bacteria. Some products will have the active ingredient within the dressings, and some come as creams, gels, ointments, or powders. Your HCP will decide on the most appropriate form of dressing for your wound.

Treatment with antimicrobial products will be reviewed by your HCP every 2 weeks and will continue until the symptoms of infection have decreased. In some cases, your HCP may change the antimicrobial product being used, or refer you to a specialist service, if there has been no improvement in your wound.

What specialist services might I be referred to?

There are many specialist services which your HCP may refer you to for assessment, diagnosis, and advice. These services include:

Dietitian, Dermatology, Podiatry, Tissue Viability, and Vascular.

Sepsis

A wound infection can spread and make you very unwell. If you are being treated for a wound infection, the following symptoms can indicate the need for urgent medical attention:

- Persistent high temperature.
- Flu-like symptoms or general discomfort/uneasiness .
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Urinating less.

If you are concerned or symptoms develop quickly, contact your HCP or out-of-hours service as soon as possible.

What can I do to help my wound heal?

Rest and exercise

Wound healing requires a balance of rest and exercise. Simply walking boosts your circulation which encourages blood flow to your wound. If your wound is on a limb, elevating the limb whilst resting reduces the risk of swelling to the area. Your HCP can advise on the correct level of activity for you.

Equipment

If your HCP recommends any equipment such as heel protectors for pressure relief, it is important that you use them and take good care of them. Your HCP will advise on how to use/look after any equipment.

Pain relief

Remember to take pain killers as prescribed or directed by your GP/Doctor. This will help you to manage any pain and allow you to move more easily. If you feel your pain is not well controlled, speak to your GP for a review.

Nutrition

A healthy and varied diet is essential to support wound healing. Your diet should include:

- Protein-rich foods such as nuts, yogurt, full-fat milk, cheese, fish, meat, eggs, and pulses (e.g., lentils, beans, chickpeas). Plant-based alternatives such as tofu and Quorn are also a good source of protein.
- Vegetables and fruit to provide much needed vitamins, minerals, and fibre.
- Complex carbohydrates which provide slow-release energy can be found in foods such as bread, pasta, rice, and potatoes.
- Plenty of fluids. Keeping well hydrated will ensure nutrients from food are able to reach the wound and support healing.

Smoking

Even one cigarette reduces the blood flow and oxygen to your wound, stops vital nutrients being absorbed by your body, and increases your risk of infection. You are 4 times more likely to successfully give up smoking with professional help. If you would like to stop smoking, contact **Quit Your Way Scotland**.

Phone: 0800 848484

Online: www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/nhs-services/helplines/quit-your-way-scotland/



Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns?

During working hours contact	
Name:	Number:
Out-of-hours or weekends contact	
Name:	Number:

If you have urgent concerns and are unable to contact your HCP, phone NHS 24 on 111.

Keeping your appointment

If you cannot keep your appointment, or have been given one that is unsuitable, please change it by phoning the number on your appointment letter. Your call will give someone else a chance to be seen and will help us to keep waiting times to a minimum.

Interpretations and Translation

This leaflet may be made available in a larger print, Braille, or your community language.

