



NOTES

Wound Care, Part 1

See this and the *Wound Care, Part 2 patient handout* at www.advanceweb.com. Select the **ADVANCE for PTs and PTAs** site from the magazine list, and click *Patient Handouts* on the left menu bar.

Sores, wounds or ulcers are three words used to describe a break in the skin or deeper tissues. Most health care professionals refer to these as wounds.

All wounds heal the same way. Open wounds build up new red tissue and then cover the red tissue from the edges of the wound with new skin. If you have a disease such as diabetes or an infection, the new tissues grow more slowly.

You are a key member of the wound care team and will be taught how to care for your wound at home, between clinic visits to your health care provider. Even with very good wound care, not all wounds heal. Most wounds can be kept clean and you can be made comfortable. Helpful hints and signs to watch for are listed here to guide you.

Keep Your Wound Clean

All wounds have germs, which will form pus. Dead tissue is often seen in chronic wounds. To control germs, it is important to clean the wound of any dead tissue.

Dead tissue is yellow, black or tan and should not be confused with a scab. The medical term for removing dead tissue is debridement. After debridement, expect the sore to get bigger and deeper because the dead tissue is removed from the space. Expect the wound to be red or pink in color.

Your health care provider may recommend you try one of following ways to debride wounds.

- Keep the wound moist with a special bandage (also known as the dressing) to allow the body's own juices to dissolve the dead tissue (autolysis).
- Apply special chemicals called enzymes to dissolve the dead tissue.
- Remove dead tissue with a sharp instrument, which may cause a little bleeding and be painful. This is called sharp debridement. Only a skilled nurse, physical therapist, podiatrist or physician should perform this procedure. Helpful Hint: Take a pain pill one hour before you receive sharp debridement.

Tell your health care provider if more dead tissue is seen in the wound after it is debrided.

Cleanse wounds at each dressing change. Use a normal saline (salt water) solution for most wound cleansing. Gently wipe the wound tissue of drainage and debris. Clean the wound with warm fluids that will soothe the wound. Helpful Hint: Test the temperature of the fluid on the inside of the wrist.

Do not cleanse the wound with skin cleansers, alcohol, peroxide, iodine or soaps with antibacterial chemicals, as these can damage the wound tissue and slow healing. If your health care provider gives you a wound irrigation product to help flush the drainage from the wound, use it as directed.

Tell your health care provider if there is pain when you cleanse the wound, if you are uncertain about using the wound irrigation product, or the wound becomes dried out and looks dark red.

Infection

Anyone can get an infection, but you are more likely to develop an infection if your immune system is weak from cancer, transplants, intensive care, long hospitalizations or tubes for intravenous lines or urinary catheters.

While dead tissue is dissolving, the wound may produce a lot of pus that has a bad smell. If that bad smell goes away after cleaning, then the wound is probably not infected.

Prevent infection with good hygiene, including frequent hand washing with soap and warm water. Be sure to wash hands before, during and after changing the wound dressing.

Tell your health care provider if you have any of the following signs of an infected sore, including:

- Thick green or yellow pus (drainage);
- Foul odor;
- Heat around the sore;
- Tenderness or pain around the sore;
- Swelling;
- Redness or deepening of the skin color around the sore.

More widespread signs of infection include fever or chills, weakness, confusion, difficulty concentrating or rapid heartbeat. Your health care provider may take a sample of the wound drainage and send it to the laboratory for analysis, which will help identify the germs that are causing the infection, and prescribe the proper medicine.

This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your health care provider.

Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.