SKIN INJURIES

CUTS
Slices open the skin. Need to be cleaned, closed, and covered with a bandage to avoid infection. Stitches may be needed for cuts that are deep, are longer than an inch, or are in an area of the body that bends.

SCRAPES
Less serious than cuts, but more painful because more sensitive nerve endings are involved.

BURNS
Can be caused from dry heat (fire), moist heat (steam, hot liquids), electricity, chemicals, and the sun (sunburn).
1st Degree—Skin is red, swollen, painful, and sensitive to touch. Usually heals in 1-2 days.
2nd Degree—Outer and lower skin layers are affected. Skin will be painful, swollen, red, blistered, and/or weepy/watery.
3rd Degree—Skin will be black and white and charred. Less painful because the nerves have been destroyed.

PUNCTURES
Wounds that stab into the skin. From splinters to stepping on a nail.

BRUISES
Caused by broken blood vessels that bleed into the tissue under the skin. Bruises cause black and blue or red skin which turns yellowish-green as it heals.

ANIMAL AND HUMAN BITES
Most commonly from dogs and cats. Wounds can get easily infected. Rabies are a concern with animal bites.

TETANUS?
For all bites, cuts, scrapes, punctures, and burns, be sure your tetanus shot is up-to-date. You will need a tetanus shot if you have not had one within 5 years for a major wound or if you have not had one within 10 years for a minor wound.

Skin Injuries: What Kind of Care Do I Need?

Do the following signs of shock occur with the injury:
- Pale or blue-colored lips, skin, fingernails
- Cool and moist skin
- Weak, but fast pulse
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Weakness, trembling, confusion, restlessness
- Difficulty standing/dizziness
- Loss of consciousness

Do any of the following describe the injury:
- Severe bleeding or blood spurts from the wound
- Bleeding continues after pressure is applied more than 10 minutes or 20 minutes to a minor cut
- Deep cut or puncture appears to go down to the muscle/bone or is on the scalp or face
- Cut is longer than an inch or is located in an area that bends
- Skin on the edges of the cut hangs open
- The burn is 3rd degree (charred black and white skin, little or no pain, exposure of tissue under the skin)
- The burn is 2nd degree (painful, swollen, red skin with blisters) and covers more than 10 square inches of skin area or is on the face, hands, feet, genitals, or any joint

Does an animal bite cause severe bleeding or severely mangled skin or has a human bite punctured the skin?

Was the bite from a wild animal or a pet that has not been immunized?

Immediate

Immediate

Immediate

Immediate

Treatment varies depending on the cause and how severe the injury is.
A day or two after the skin injury, do one or more of these signs of infection occur:

- Fever
- Redness or red streaks that extend from the wound site
- Swelling, increased pain, or tenderness at and around the wound site
- Increased pain
- General ill feeling

Was the cut or puncture from dirty or contaminated objects, such as rusty nails or objects in the soil or did a puncture go through a shoe, especially a rubber-soled one?

With a skin injury, are any of the following present:

- A burn that does not improve after two days.
- With a 2nd degree burn, more than the outer skin layer has been affected; more than 2 inches in diameter of the skin has burned; or blisters have formed.
- Bruises appear often and easily; take longer than 2 weeks to go away; or over a year’s time; more than 2 or 3 bruises appear for no reason
- Vision problems occur with a bruise near the eye.

Skin Injuries: What Kind of Care Do I Need? (Continued)

**For Minor Cuts and Scrapes:** Clean the wound thoroughly with soap and water. Press on the cut to stop the bleeding for up to 10 minutes. Use sterile gauze or a clean cloth. After bleeding has stopped, apply an antibiotic cream (like Neosporin). Bandage the cut. For scrapes, make a bandage from gauze and tape. Change it every day or two. Keep bandages clean and dry.

**For Minor Punctures:** Remove the object (like a splinter) with clean, sterile tweezers. Soak the wound in warm, soapy water 2 to 4 times a day. Dry, and apply antibiotic cream.

**For Bruises:** Apply a cold pack if possible within 15 minutes of the injury. Rest the bruised area and raise it above the heart level, if practical. Two days after the injury, use warm compresses. Do not bandage. Avoid hitting the bruised area.

**For Animal Bites:** Wash the bite with soap and water for 5 minutes. Flush with water. Dry the wound and get immediate care.

Skin Injuries: What Kind of Care Do I Need? (Continued)–BURNS and SUNBURNS

**For 1st Degree Burns:**

Immerse the affected area in cold (not ice) water until the pain subsides. If the affected area is dirty, gently wash it with soapy water first. Keep the area uncovered and elevated, if possible. Apply a dry dressing, if necessary, to protect the area from dirt, etc. Do not use butter or ointments, such as Vaseline. You can, however, apply aloe vera 3 to 4 times a day. Don’t use local anesthetic sprays and creams.

**For 2nd Degree Burns:**

- Immerse the affected area in cold (not ice) water until the pain subsides. Dip clean cloths in cold water, wring them out, and apply them to the burned area for as long as an hour. Blot the area dry. Do not rub. Don’t use antiseptic sprays or creams. Do not break any blisters. If the blisters break on their own, apply an antibacterial spray or ointment and keep the area wrapped with a sterile dressing. Once dried, dress the area with a single layer of loose gauze that does not stick to the skin. Keep it in place with bandage tape that is placed well away from the burned area. Change the dressing the next day and every 2 days after that. Prop the burned area higher than the rest of the body, if possible. See a health care provider if the burn does not improve after 2 days, more than the outer skin layer has been affected, or more than 3 inches in diameter of the skin has burned.

**For 3rd Degree Burns:**

If charring of the skin occurs (the skin looks black and white), and pain is not severe, seek health care immediately.