



Education

Cuts and Scratches

What are cuts and scratches?

Cuts are skin injuries caused by sharp objects. Scratches are areas of damage to the upper layers of skin. Most cuts and scratches are not very deep and do not go past the skin into muscles or fatty tissues. Deep cuts that are longer than 1/2 inch (1/4 inch if on the face) and leave the skin edges separated or gaping, need stitches (sutures).

How can I take care of my child?

Treatment

- Apply direct pressure for 10 minutes to stop any bleeding.
- Wash the wound with soap and water for 5 minutes. Remove any bits of dirt, small pieces of rock, or other debris.
- Cut off any pieces of loose skin using small scissors (for torn skin with scrapes).
- Apply an antibiotic ointment such as Neosporin and cover it with a Band-Aid or gauze. Wash the wound and change the Band-Aid or gauze daily. Another option is to use liquid skin bandages that seal over cuts and scrapes. They are a major improvement over Band-aids and antibiotic ointment. They only need to be applied once. They give faster healing and lower infection rates. After the wound is washed and dried, you spray or swab the liquid on. It dries in less than a minute and may last for a week. It is resistant to water. You can buy it at your local pharmacy.
- Give acetaminophen or ibuprofen as needed for pain relief.

Common mistakes in treating cuts and scratches

- Don't use alcohol or Merthiolate on open wounds. They sting and damage normal tissue.
- Don't kiss an open wound because the wound will become contaminated by the many germs in a person's mouth.
- Let the scab fall off by itself; picking it off may cause a scar.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Bleeding doesn't stop after you have applied pressure directly to the area of the cut for 10 minutes.
- The skin is split open and might need sutures.
- There is any dirt in the wound that you can't get out.
- The cut looks infected (for example, pus, redness, red streaks.)

Note: Lacerations (deep cuts) must be sutured within 12 hours of the time of injury, and they are much less likely to become infected if they are sutured within 2 hours.

Call during office hours if:

- Your child hasn't had a tetanus booster in more than 10 years (5 years if the cut is dirty).
- The wound doesn't heal within 10 days.
- You have other questions or concerns.

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