

Wound Care - A Guide For Patients and Carers

This leaflet is for people who have a wound. It is also helpful for family members and carers. It will help you to understand how you can help a wound to improve and heal faster. If you want information on caring for a leg ulcer or a pressure ulcer, please read the relevant leaflets on <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare/community-funded-schemes/wound-care/wound-care.html>

What is a wound?

A wound is a break in the skin. It can have many different causes, including:

- injury,
- surgery,
- pressure sore or bed sore, and
- leg ulcer due to problems with circulation.

Wound healing

Most wounds will heal within two- six weeks. Healing may be delayed for reasons including infection, poor dietary intake etc. If your wound care is being provided by the GP or GP practice nurse, and the wound is not healing after 6 weeks, you should request a referral to a specialist wound care service.

How does a wound heal?

Healing occurs in 2 ways;

1. The wound is sutured, glued or stapled together and normal wound healing occurs with the edges kept together by these products.
2. This healing occurs when the wound heals from the outer edge inwards in a moist warm environment of a suitable dressing. This is the way most wounds heal.

The best ways of improving wound healing is to follow your nurse/ GP's advice in relation to the dressing applied and leave it in place until next appointment with your Nurse/ GP.

Eat a healthy diet

Your body needs energy (calories), proteins, fluids, vitamins and minerals every day. This is especially important if you have a wound that is healing.

Eating well at this time helps your body heal faster and fight infection. If you are not eating enough healthy food or the right balance of foods, this can delay or slow down healing.

Take foods in their natural form where possible, such as fruit and vegetables. Five servings daily will give you your required vitamin C.

Protein, iron and zinc rich foods such as fish, lean meat, chicken, eggs, peas, beans, and dairy products are needed. This booklet is available to download from

<https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/onmsd/how-to-eat-well-for-wound-healing-a-guide-for-patients-their-families-and-carers.pdf>

Use pain relief if needed

Take pain relief tablets as prescribed by your GP, if you need them. If you are in pain, you are less inclined to move or to eat, and good food and gentle movement are both helpful for healing. Some pain relief tablets can lead to constipation so please speak to your GP or nurse, if you have any concerns.

Smoking

If you smoke, consider stopping. Smoking negatively affects wound healing. Smoking causes constriction/tightness in the blood vessels therefore reducing the flow of blood, oxygen and nutrition's to the wound. This interferes with the healing of the wound.

The HSE provides a range of services to help you stop smoking. Speak to your healthcare professional if you would like more information about services near you. For smoking cessation advice and support, contact the **HSE Quit Team** on Freephone **1800 201 203** or visit <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/quit-smoking/> for more details.



Avoid infection

Try not to touch your wound as this can increase the risk of infection. If you have to touch your wound in order to care for it, **always** wash your hands before and after touching the wound area.

If you experience any of the following symptoms, please tell your nurse:

- High temperature (fever)
- Increased redness, pain or swelling around the wound
- An offensive smell from the wound
- The wound feels hot
- Thick yellowy discharge leaking from the dressing
- Feeling generally unwell

Wound dressings:

- It is likely that you will need to have a dressing on the wound. This will help keep the area clean and it will help with healing.
- It is important that you are fully aware of and follow the treatment plan you have agreed with the nurse who is caring for you.
- Dressings should not be removed unless they fall off. If this does happen, use a simple dressing to protect the wound and contact your nurse immediately.

If you notice any of the following, contact your nurse:

- ! An increase in the amount of discharge or oozing from the wound
- ! The dressing becomes wet at any time
- ! You experience an increased amount of pain from the wound
- ! An unusual smell from the wound
- ! An increase in redness around the wound

Your local health centre contact details:

Nurse:

Address:

Phone number:
