

Wound Care for Cuts

What is a cut?

Cuts are wounds that go through several layers of skin and may go deeper into the fat, muscle, blood vessels, or other tissues under the skin. A cut can be seen on the surface of the skin and may be straight, jagged, or run in several directions. A cut is also called a laceration.

What is the cause?

Most cuts happen:

- During a fall or an accident
- By running into or getting hit with something sharp, pointed, or hard
- While working with something sharp, pointed, rough, or jagged
- By a deep scratch or bite from an animal

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- An opening in the skin, or loss of skin
- Pain
- Redness
- Sometimes bleeding

How is it treated?

The treatment of a wound depends on what caused the wound, where it is, and the size and shape. You can take care of some cuts yourself. A healthcare provider should treat large, deep, or jagged wounds. A wound heals more quickly, and with less risk of infection and scarring, when the wound is kept clean and the edges are held close together as it heals.

Call or see your healthcare provider when you have a new cut if:

- You have a large, deep, or jagged wound or bleeding that will not stop.
- Your cut was caused by something that went through several layers of clothing or through a shoe
- You have numbness or tingling near the wound.
- You have not had a tetanus shot in the last 5 years and have a wound caused by a dirty object or there is dirt in the wound.
- There are foreign objects in the wound, such as wood, glass, or metal slivers.
- You can see bone, muscle, or tendon in the wound.
- You have any questions about how to treat the wound.

How can I take care of myself?

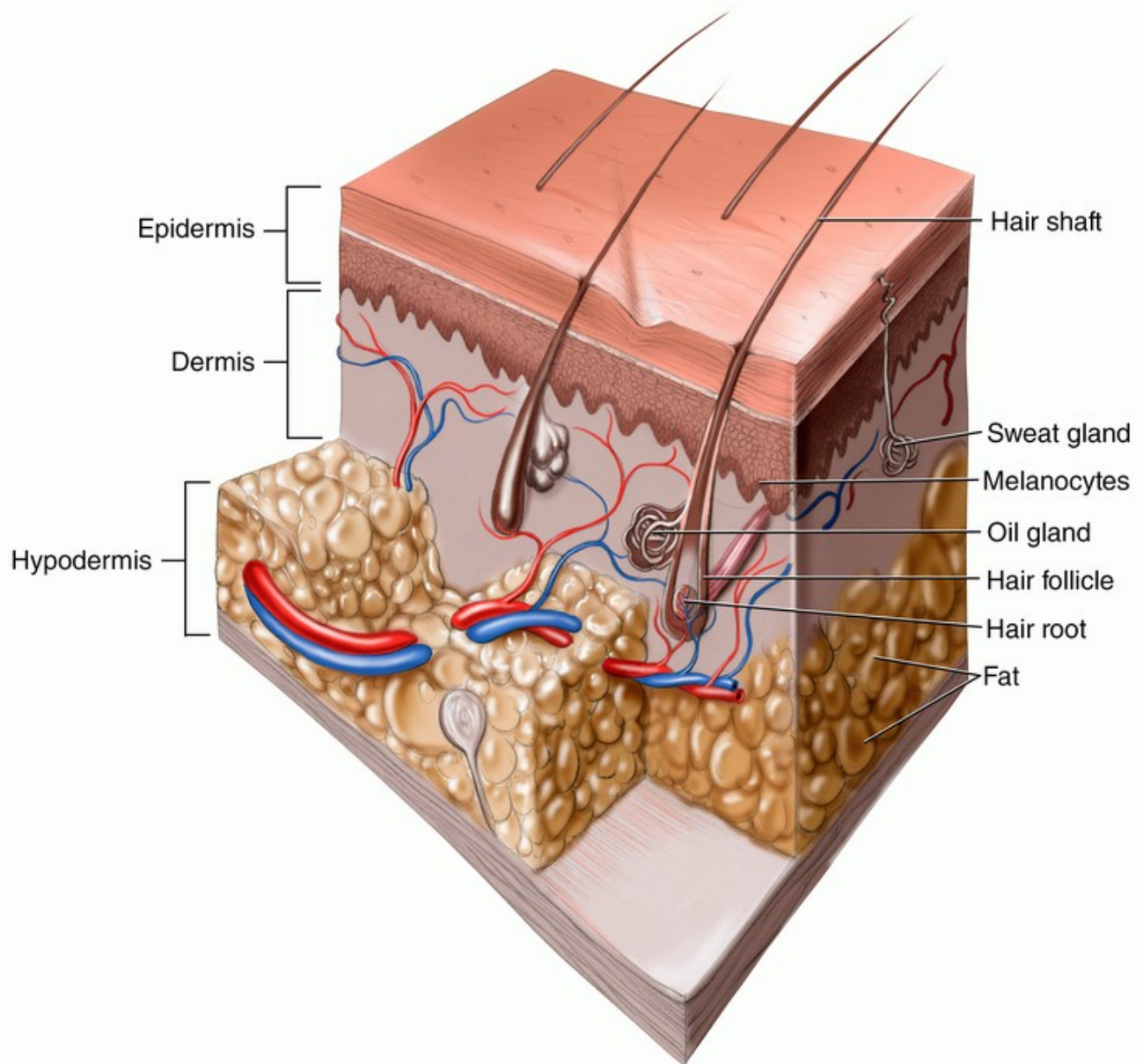
If you have a small cut:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15 seconds before you touch the area.
- Clean the wound as well as possible with mild soap and water. Remove any bits of dirt, small pieces of rock, or other debris that you can easily see, but do not poke or pick at the wound.
- If it's bleeding and is spurting blood, put pressure on it with a bandage or clean cloth and get the medical care right away. You may need to call 911.
- If it's not spurting blood but oozing, put pressure on the wound with a clean cloth or bandage until the bleeding stops, which may take up to 20 minutes. If the wound is still bleeding after 20 minutes, call your health care provider.
- Keep the wound and the area around it clean and dry. You may need to put a bandage over the area to keep it clean and dry. Change the bandage every day. Change the bandage more often if it gets dirty or wet.
- To prevent infection in a minor wound, you may use a nonprescription antibiotic ointment. Read the labels and buy products that have only the ingredients that you need and are not allergic to. If you are not sure which medicine is best for your wound, ask your pharmacist.
- Don't take aspirin if your wound is bleeding. If needed, take nonprescription pain medicine, such as acetaminophen. Read the label and take as directed. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen or naproxen may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, don't take an NSAID for more than 10 days.
- As the wound heals, some swelling, redness, and mild pain are normal.
- Call your healthcare provider if you have:
 - Symptoms of infection, which include new or worsening redness, swelling, pain, warmth, or drainage in the area of the wound
 - New bleeding from the wound that won't stop
 - Pain that is increasing or not getting better with pain medicine
 - Red streaks going from the wound toward the center of your body, for example, up your arm
 - Fever, chills, nausea, vomiting, or muscle aches
 - Any questions about caring for the wound

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Skin: Cross Section



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