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Cuts (or lacerations) are open wounds that usually result from an injury to the skin. To take care of a cut, the first steps are to stop the bleeding and determine whether or not stitches (sutures) are needed. Bleeding from minor cuts will usually stop on its own or with direct pressure. To decide whether stitches are needed, see “Are stitches necessary?” on the reverse side. If stitches are needed, apply home treatment and seek medical care as soon as possible (preferably within 6 to 8 hours after the injury) to reduce the risk of infection. If stitches are not needed, you can clean and bandage the cut at home.

Home treatment

Most cuts can be cleaned and bandaged at home. Proper home treatment can prevent infection and promote healing. You may need additional medical care for your wound if you are at high risk of infection, have other injuries, or need stitches or a tetanus shot.

- **Stop the bleeding**

The first step is to stop the bleeding. Apply direct, continuous pressure over the wound for 15 minutes. For severe bleeding, you may need to lie down and elevate the wound. Cuts that continue to bleed after 15 minutes of direct pressure usually require stitches, so you’ll want to seek treatment as soon as possible.

- **Wash the wound**

After the bleeding has stopped, wash the cut gently with soap and water. It is important to clean the wound before bandaging it to reduce the risk of infection. If the cut begins to bleed again, apply pressure as before.

- **Apply ointment**

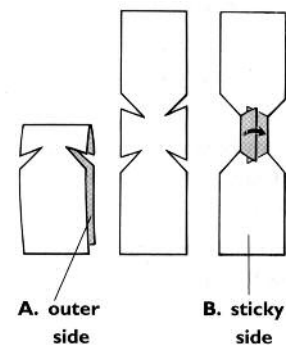
Before applying a bandage, treat the cut with an antibiotic ointment (such as Neosporin or a generic triple antibiotic ointment). This will keep the cut from sticking to the bandage. Do not use rubbing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, iodine, or mercuriochrome. These solutions can harm tissue and slow healing.

- **Protect the wound**

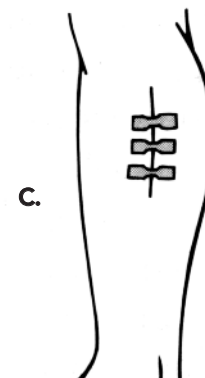
Use an adhesive bandage (such as a Band-Aid) to provide continuous pressure. Always put an adhesive strip across a cut rather than lengthwise.

A **butterfly bandage** (made at home or purchased) can help hold cut skin edges together.

- Cut a strip from a roll of one inch adhesive first aid tape and fold it sticky side out.
- Cut notches into the tape, as shown in the illustration.



- Unfold the tape, then fold the notched pieces together (sticky side in) as in illustration B. The center of the tape will be non-sticky and can be placed directly over the cut. Be sure to keep this part clean.
- Place one end of the tape on the skin, then pull the other end to close the wound tightly as in illustration C.



- If the cut is long, use more than one bandage.
- Apply a clean bandage at least once a day, or when the bandage gets wet or dirty.

• **Pain relief**

To help relieve pain during the first few days, elevate the area above your heart and put a cold pack on top of the dressing. A nonprescription pain reliever (like acetaminophen or ibuprofen) may also help.

Are stitches necessary?

For best results, cuts that need stitches should be sutured within 8 hours. Wash the cut gently and stop the bleeding, then pinch the sides of the cut together. If the edges of the wound come together and it looks better, you may want to consider stitches. If you think stitches are needed, avoid using an antibiotic ointment until after a health professional has examined the cut.

Stitches may be needed for:

- Cuts that continue to bleed after 15 minutes of direct pressure
- Deep cuts on a joint, such as on the elbow, knuckle, or knee
- Deep cuts on the palm side of the hand or on the fingers
- Deep wounds that are gaping and cannot be pinched closed
- Wounds on the face, lips, eyelids or any area where you are worried about scarring (for cosmetic reasons)

When these types of cuts are sutured, they usually heal with less scarring.

Stitches may not be needed for:

- Cuts with smooth edges that tend to stay together during normal movement of the affected body part
- Shallow cuts less than 1/4 inch deep and less than one inch long
- Most puncture wounds, which tend to be smaller and heal better when left alone

Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .

- The cut needs stitches (within eight hours)
- A cut continues to bleed through bandages after 15 minutes of direct pressure
- The person goes into shock, even if bleeding has stopped
- Blood or clear fluid drains from the ears or nose following a blow to the head (not due to a cut or direct blow to the nose)
- The skin near the wound is blue, white, or cold
- You have numbness, tingling, or loss of feeling
- The person is unable to move a limb below the wound
- Your tetanus shots are not up to date (within two days of being injured, if needed)
- The cut contains, or might contain, foreign objects, such as wood or gravel
- Signs of infection develop, such as:
 - increased pain, swelling, redness, or tenderness
 - heat or red streaks extending away from the cut
 - discharge of pus

- fever of 100°F or higher with no other cause
- pain and tenderness that gets worse

- You need an appointment to have your sutures removed

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.