

# How to Clean a Wound Without Proper Supplies

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Reviewed

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Sometimes, often during camping trips, you may find yourself wounded without proper supplies. There are ways you can attempt to treat a wound without the right equipment, but keep in mind all methods carry the inherent risk of infection. You need to be extremely careful when treating a wound without equipment. You should only do so if you or someone else is losing blood and you cannot wait on emergency help. Try to make use of the cleanest equipment you have with you to dress and clean the wound. Once you've stopped bleeding as best you can, seek immediate medical attention. Wounds can become infected, and may require stitches. The sooner you get to a hospital and receive proper treatment, the better your chances are of treating the wound without complication.

Method  
1

## Cleaning the Wound Initially

**1 Wash your hands, if possible.** Before treating a wound, it's recommended that you do so with clean hands. This can prevent bacteria from your hands affecting the wound.<sup>[1]</sup> If you have access to running water and soap, use this to clean your hands. However, wounds often happen when camping. In this case, you may have to improvise.

- If you have any kind of clean, disposable gloves, try using these. However, do not use regular gloves, as these probably contain a lot of bacteria. Only use previously unused disposable plastic gloves, that have been stored in a sealable bag or container.
- If you have some kind of hand sanitizer, you may want to use this. It can get some of the bacteria off of your hands.

**2 Apply pressure.** You want to stop bleeding, as blood loss can lead to serious complications. Most minor wounds will stop bleeding if you apply a small amount of pressure to the wound.<sup>[2]</sup> You should apply pressure for 10 to 15 minutes, then examine the wound. If it's still bleeding, apply pressure for another 10 to 15 minutes.<sup>[3]</sup> Ideally, you would use a clean cloth or band-aid in this situation, as all materials should be sterile. Without proper supplies, however, you may have to improvise.

- If you have clean gloves, direct hand-to-wound contact may be safe in this case, and even preferable to using unclean cloths or clothing.<sup>[4]</sup> Without gloves, however, things can get complicated. You could see if you have any supplies on hand. Sterile bandaids can help. Tampons are generally sterile, and some soldiers and campers have used them to apply pressure or dress a wound. This can also be an option in a bind.<sup>[5]</sup>
- Keep in mind there is no substitute for safe, sterile material you would find in a hospital or in a conventional first aid kit. If you have to apply pressure to a wound with questionable material, you should seek medical attention as soon as you are able. If you're camping in a group, it's a good idea to have someone seek out medical help while you're applying pressure to a wound.

**3 Examine the wound when the bleeding stops.** Once the bleeding stops, examine the wound. You want to assess how serious the damage is, as this information can be useful when you receive medical care. The area outside the wound should be pink. The wounded party should not be experiencing loss of sensation.<sup>[6]</sup>

- If you notice loss of sensation, or any major discolorations, this is a sign of a serious infection. Your top priority should be seeking medical help. Do so before proceeding. Untreated infections can cause serious, possibly deadly, complications.

**4 Clean the wound as best you can.** If the wound does not look seriously infected, proper cleaning can prevent infection. Ideally, you would should use saline, tap water, or disinfected water. Do not use water from a stream to clean a wound.<sup>[7]</sup>

- In a bind, tap water is fine. If you're camping, see if you have any bottled water on hand to clean the wound.

Iodine, rubbing alcohol, or hydrogen peroxide should be avoided, however, as these can cause tissue damage.

- Pour water over the wound to wash away any dirt and bacteria. Be careful. Pour with enough force to dislodge any foreign materials, but do not pour so vigorously dirt and debris gets further lodged in the wound.

**5 Cover the wound, if possible.** Covering a wound can greatly help prevent infection. If you have sterile material, you can use this to bandage the wound. Ideally, you should use sterile bandages or gauze from a first aid kit.<sup>[8]</sup> You may have to improvise, however, and make temporary use of sterile materials like tampons.

- A minor cut or scrape can probably be left uncovered. It may be safer to leave minor scrapes uncovered if you do not have proper supplies.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Method 2

### Getting Help

**1 Seek medical attention immediately.** You should not leave a wound improperly treated for long. As soon as you or the wounded party is stable enough to move, seek medical attention. If you have cellphone reception, call 9-1-1. If you do not have reception, move to an area where you get reception and make the call. It's critical to seek medical attention immediately if you've dressed or cleaned a wound without proper supplies.

- If you're without a phone, find the nearest road and try to flag down help.
- If you're camping, make use of emergency devices. Use emergency flares to signal you need help, if you have them. You can also blow a whistle to try to get the attention of other campers or people nearby.<sup>[10]</sup>

**2 Receive stitches, if necessary.** A deep wound may require stitches. At the hospital, a doctor will evaluate whether stitches are necessary. If they are, you will receive stitches in the hospital after the wound is properly cleaned.<sup>[11]</sup>

- Stitches that are applied quickly after a wound is discovered are unlikely to leave heavy scarring. It also greatly reduces the risk of infection.
- There are many different types of stitches. The proper care protocol for your stitches depend on their type, and the amount. Talk to your doctor about follow up care for your stitches before leaving the hospital. Follow all your doctor's instructions regarding caring for your stitches at home.

**3 Get proper dressing for a wound from medical professionals.** Not all wounds will require stitches. Some wounds merely need to be covered to prevent infection. At the hospital, you should receive proper covering for your wound.<sup>[12]</sup>

- Adhesive tapes and bandages can be used to dress wound. You can also use paper tape, rolled gauze, or an elastic bandage.
- At the hospital, a doctor or nurse will choose the best dressing for you given your wound's stage. As long as you're getting dressing from a hospital, it is probably clean and safe.

**4 Change your dressing at least once a day.** A wound's dressing needs to be changed to prevent infection. As your wound heals, you'll need to change the dressing as it becomes messy or wet. Usually, you'll need to change the dressing at least once a day. For more serious wounds, dressing may need to be changed more often.<sup>[13]</sup>

- Usually, your doctor will provide you with instructions on how to change your dressing before you leave the hospital. You can usually buy fresh dressing at a drug store. Your doctor may also provide you with extra dressing before you leave the hospital.

## Method 3

### Preventing Accidents in the Future

**1 Travel with a first aid kit in the future.** It's not safe to clean a wound with material that aren't sterile. In the future, carry a first aid kit when camping. This way, you'll have clean gauze and other supplies on hand in the event of an accident or injury. Working with clean and sterile material greatly reduces the risk of a wound becoming infected.

**2 Get a tetanus shot.** Tetanus is a bacteria disease that affects a sufferer's nervous system. Bacteria that causes tetanus can be found in dust, soil, and dirt. A wound accrued when camping or hiking can cause tetanus if you have not been vaccinated.<sup>[14]</sup>

- Check your vaccination records. You can usually get these from your doctor. As a lot of vaccinations are given out when you're young, try asking your parents. They may know where your vaccination record is.
- If you have not had a tetanus shot in the past 5 years, get one. It's especially important to get vaccinated before camping, as you do not want to get tetanus if you end up wounded. If you're being treated for a wound at the hospital, a tetanus shot may be recommended.<sup>[15]</sup>

**3 Be aware of your surroundings when camping.** When camping, know your surroundings. When you set up your tent, do so during the day. Scan the area for bumps, hills, and crevices. Know where you're likely to slip and fall, and avoid these areas to prevent injuries.<sup>[16]</sup>

**4 Make sure you know the quickest way to receive medical help in an emergency.** If you go camping, make sure you know how to access emergency services quickly. Know where the nearest highway is, and take an emergency flare or whistle so you can call for help if necessary. It's also a good idea to carry a charged cell phone when camping. In the event you need assistance, you can call for help on your cell.

## Community Q&A

**In a survival situation, how would you treat a wound infection?**



You should strive to stop bleeding and dress the wound with the cleanest material you have. Then, try to seek medical attention as soon as possible. It's a very bad idea to attempt to treat an infection on your own. If a wound is infected, seeking medical help should be your number one priority. Infection may be prevented if you immediately clean and dress the wound.

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**Can I use alcohol to clean a wound?**



No, you should not use rubbing alcohol. This can damage tissue. Instead, go for the cleanest water supply on hand.

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## Warnings

- The instructions in this article are meant to be used in extreme cases, where proper supplies are not readily available and a wound is bleeding profusely. They are not a substitute for medical intervention. You should not attempt to treat a wound yourself without proper supplies simply to avoid going to a hospital. If you need to treat a wound in an emergency, do the best you can and then seek medical attention as soon as possible. Infections can cause serious, possibly deadly, complications.

## Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-cuts/basics/art-20056711>
2. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-cuts/basics/art-20056711>
3. <http://boyslife.org/outdoors/wilderness-first-aid-qa/28852/how-to-treat-a-knife-cut/>

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