Cuts, Scrapes, & Punctures

Minor cuts, scrapes, and punctures are common injuries that we experience from time to time. While the vast majority of these injuries can easily be handled at home, some are potentially serious, warranting medical attention. The first step in treating one of these injuries is to identify the type of injury you have.

**Cuts.** A cut slices the skin and is also referred to as a laceration.

**Scrapes.** Scrapes (abrasions) occur when several layers of skin are removed as a result of brushing against an abrasive surface. These injuries tend to be somewhat painful as nerve endings are exposed.

**Punctures.** Puncture wounds leave holes in the skin and are usually caused by sharp objects penetrating the skin.

**When To Seek Care For A Cut, Scrape, Or Puncture**

In some cases, a cut, scrape, or puncture may be serious enough that it requires medical attention. If you experience any of the following, seek medical assistance.

- If the wound appears to be serious and is on the head, neck, chest, abdomen, or face, or a serious hand wound

- If the victim is showing signs of shock (pale, gray, or cool skin; weak or rapid pulse; slow or shallow breathing; or nausea and vomiting)

- If bleeding cannot be controlled

- If there is tingling or numbness at the wound site

- If the individual is unable to move fingers or toes

- If the wound exhibits signs of infection (oozing pus, turning red, swelling, or a fever develops)

- If the victim has not had a tetanus shot within the last 10 years

**Treating Cuts, Scrapes, & Punctures At Home**

Many cuts, scrapes, and punctures can be treated easily at home. The exceptions, however, are those accompanied by uncontrollable bleeding, numbness, an inability to move extremities, and the signs mentioned on the previous page.
Cuts, Scrapes, & Punctures (continued)

Treat cuts, scrapes, and punctures with self-care using the following simple steps.

Cuts

+ Stop the bleeding by applying direct pressure to the wound. Most bleeding should stop within a few minutes if direct pressure is applied to the wound. If a wound bleeds profusely for more than four to five minutes, call 911.

+ For minor cuts, cleanse the wound vigorously with soap and water.

+ Consider using an antibiotic ointment to prevent infection.

+ Apply a bandage to the wound. Bandages should be changed daily.

+ Use over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen or acetaminophen to ease your pain.

+ Watch for signs of infection (oozing puss, turning red, fever, and swelling).

Scrapes

+ Clean the scrape thoroughly with soap and warm water. Scrapes tend to be very dirty and are often embedded with debris.

+ Consider using an antibiotic ointment to prevent infection.

+ Because a small amount of bleeding can be expected, it's recommended that you cover the scrape with a bandage initially. Once the scrape scabs over, a bandage is no longer necessary.

+ Use an ice pack to help reduce any swelling or bruising. Don't apply ice directly to the affected area—instead, use an ice bag.

+ Use over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen or acetaminophen to relieve pain—heed allergies or other medical conditions.

+ Watch for signs of infection (oozing puss, turning red, fever, and swelling).

Puncture

+ As long as the puncture wound is not gushing or squiring blood, let it bleed for one to two minutes—this will help to cleanse the wound.

+ Further cleanse the wound with soap and water.

+ Consider using an antibiotic ointment to prevent infection.

+ Apply a bandage to the wound. Bandages should be changed daily.

+ Watch for signs of infection (oozing puss, turning red, fever, and swelling).

+ Contact your healthcare professional to determine if a tetanus shot is needed. If it has been longer than 10 years since a tetanus shot was administered, or if you have experienced a serious injury in the last five years, you'll probably need another tetanus shot.

An Emergency Essential

The Right Way To Control Bleeding. When applying pressure to a cut, scrape, or puncture to stop the bleeding, DO NOT remove the bandage if it becomes saturated with blood. Simply apply a new bandage on top of the saturated one, and continue to apply pressure to stop the bleeding. Change the bandage only after the bleeding has stopped.

Take Test