



“Excellence in Home Care”

Wound Care Education

www.BethanyHealthcare.com

What Happens When a Wound Occurs?

Skin is an organ and has the same oxygen and nutrient requirements as the heart, lungs, kidneys, and other organs. Any break in the integrity of the skin causes a wound. Wounds are either acute or chronic. Acute wounds are caused by trauma or surgery and usually require limited time with local care to heal.

Chronic wounds take longer than expected to heal and are a symptom that there are other underlying medical problems such as poor nutrition, diabetes, heart and lung disease, poor circulation, and certain medications that prevent the wound from healing. The underlying problems need to be addressed along with local wound care.

Types of Wounds

There are four common causes of chronic wounds:

- Pressure ulcers
- Arterial ulcers
- Venous ulcers
- Neuropathic ulcers (usually caused by diabetic neuropathy)



Pressure Ulcers usually occur over a bony prominence when a person has lost mobility and can not change position. The tissue is squeezed between the bone and a surface (chair, bed) and stops the blood flow through the blood vessels causing the tissues to die.

Arterial Ulcers occur on the extremities. Arteries carry oxygen rich blood from the heart to the body’s arms, hands, legs, and feet. If the feet or legs do not get adequate blood flow a wound can occur on the toes, in between the toes or the outside ankle bone. The pain is often severe and/or excruciating.

Signs of arterial insufficiency:

- Skin is cool, shiny without hair
- Toes can look “blue”
- Pain begins in the calves, thighs, and buttock with exercise

- Starts after walking for a while (nearly the same distance each time)
- Stops when you stop and rest
- Pain when legs are elevated

Suggestions

Tell your doctor what you are doing when pain begins and when it stops.

- Take part in a supervised exercise program
- Investigate surgery
- Consider medications

Venous disease occurs when the oxygen depleted blood is hindered when traveling back up the leg veins to return the blood to the heart. The ulcer usually occurs under the inside ankle bone. The pain is described as “aching.”

Signs of Venous disease

- Leg swelling
- Brown stain on lower one-third of leg
- Itchy rash around ankles
- Pain is relieved when legs are elevated

Suggestions

Tell your doctor what you are doing when your pain begins and what stops it.

- Avoid standing for long periods of time
- Sit with legs elevated

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- Wear support stockings
- Investigate surgery

Neuropathic ulcers occur when there is damage to the peripheral nervous system or microcirculation.

Common causes are:

- Diabetes (60-70%)
- Neuromuscular and spinal cord diseases
- Nutritional disease

The pain is described as:

- Burning
- Tingling
- Electric shock
- Shooting
- Worse at night

The neuropathic diabetic foot has no feeling. Often the person does not know there is a wound on the bottom of the foot. It was once covered with a callus that covered a worsening ulcer until it opened up.

Suggestions

- Diabetics need to control blood sugars
- Diabetics and others with neuropathy should examine their feet every day
- Always wear shoes
- Shoes need to fit properly
- Calluses on the bottoms of the feet can cause problems if not removed

Treatment

The best way to prevent wounds is to identify the underlying disease, to correct the cause of the disease, and to eliminate the risk factors that make the disease worse.

Despite prevention, if a wound does occur, patients should seek medical care and support for:

- Wound healing
- Nutrition; multivitamins; glucose control; hydration measures
- Providing the environment for wound healing to occur

Other treatment methods to investigate may be:

- Negative pressure wound therapy
- Ultrasound
- Hyperbaric oxygen therapy
- Physical therapy such as electrical stimulation

Costs of Wound Care:

Non-healing wounds cost our healthcare system billions of dollars, \$11 billion in 2007 for pressure ulcers alone.

The cost to treat one pressure ulcer (in a long term facility) may be more than \$50,000.

Amputations due to Diabetes cost \$2 billion a year.

Bethany HomeHealth Can Help

In collaboration with the primary care giver, Bethany Home Health Nurses are trained and educated by a WOC Nurse (Wound Ostomy Continence Nurse) to provide excellence in wound care. They help patients prevent and manage infection and recover in their homes by providing:

- Wound cleaning and dressing, minimizing infection
- Dressings that maintain the proper amount of moisture and protect the surrounding skin
- Methods to eliminate or minimize pain
- Treatment evaluation and recommendations for prevention of wounds
- Goal-oriented assessments

Physical and occupational therapists work with patients to improve functional mobility through:

- Safety evaluation and training
- Gait training
- Muscular strengthening exercises

Sources: Wound Ostomy Continence Nurses Society Guideline for Management of Patients with Wounds

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