

Skin tears

The South Australian
Wound Management
Association
www.sawma.org.au



What a skin tear is

A skin tear is a type of wound caused by trauma that leads to a tearing or a loss of skin. A skin tear can lead to a cut or an abrasion type wound.

A skin tear can be shallow or deep.

What a skin tear looks like

Sometimes a skin tear can leave a loose flap of skin. Often there is bruising.

Who is at risk for a skin tear

People with fragile skin are at risk of a skin tear. This includes: older persons; persons who use equipment such as wheelchairs or walkers; persons with poor vision or mobility; or persons taking medicines such as steroids or blood thinners.

How to help reduce the risk of a skin tear

Use a moisturiser regularly.

Drink plenty of fluids (but not too much caffeine or alcohol).

Wear long sleeves and pants.

Be careful when using equipment or handling skin.

Specialised limb protectors are available from some medical suppliers for persons at high risk of skin tears.

How to care for a skin tear

Always wash hands with soap and water for 15 seconds and dry them on a clean towel before cleaning or dressing any wound.

If the wound is still bleeding use a clean towel to apply gentle pressure to the area until the bleeding stops.

Carefully wash the wound under water.

Pat the area dry very carefully.

If there is a loose flap of skin carefully place the skin back over the open wound but do not stretch the skin.

Cover the wound with a non adherent dressing. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or health professional for advice on an appropriate dressing.

Change the dressing if it becomes wet, soiled or soaked with wound drainage.

Try to avoid changing the dressing too often as this can cause more damage.

When to seek advice from a doctor

If the wound is larger than a 50 cent piece in size.

If the wound does not stop bleeding within 10 minutes.

If the wound bleeds every time the dressing is changed.

If the wound becomes painful or inflamed and this does not settle down in a couple of days.

If the drainage from the wound becomes excessive, smelly or discoloured.

If the wound becomes black.

If the wound has not healed in four weeks or if the wound becomes larger.

If there are any other concerns regarding the wound.

This information is intended as a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a trained health professional.

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