

# Wound cleaning

The South Australian  
Wound Management  
Association  
[www.sawma.org.au](http://www.sawma.org.au)



## Why it is important to clean a wound

Cleaning a wound removes blood, foreign material, dirt, some surface bacteria (germs) and allows proper assessment of the wound.

A wound should be cleaned before putting a dressing on it and every time a wound dressing is changed.

## How to clean a wound

Always use clean equipment.

Assemble the required equipment. This may include:

- A clean plastic bowl or similar.

- A clean towel and flannel or clean, disposable woven towels (eg Chux™).

Do not use cotton balls to clean a wound as they can leave fibres in the wound.

- A mild cleanser or mild bath/shower wash. Avoid using regular bar soaps as these can make the skin too dry.

Wash hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds and dry them thoroughly on a clean towel and/or use an alcohol hand sanitizer.

Wet the clean cloth and apply a small amount of cleanser to it.

Gently wash the wound and the skin around the wound.

Rinse thoroughly.

Pat the wound and the skin around the wound dry carefully.

Some wounds can be washed under a shower in the same way described above.

Wounds on the sole of the foot should not be washed in the shower.

Apply a dressing to the wound if required. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or health professional for advice on an appropriate dressing.

## Antiseptics

Antiseptics (e.g. Betadine™) are normally only used for short time period.

Antiseptics are normally used to wash dirty wounds or sometimes for wounds that are not healing, or for wounds that are infected.

Antiseptics should not be applied to clean, healing wounds.

If using a liquid antiseptic apply a generous amount to the wound and the skin around the wound. Leave the antiseptic on for 3-5 minutes then wash it off.

## When to seek advice from a doctor

If the wound bleeds every time it is cleaned.

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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