

Slow Wound Healing

Skin is your body's first line of defense against infection. Your body has several mechanisms to heal wounds but there are a number of things that can slow or even stop the healing process.

- **Infection:** Broken skin lets in bacteria and other foreign material that cause infection. If you have an infection, your body's resources go to fighting the infection instead of going towards healing.
- **Poor circulation:** The materials needed for a wound to heal are brought to the site by your blood, using the blood vessels to travel. If the needed blood isn't getting to your tissues, you have poor circulation. There are many causes of poor circulation including diabetes, obesity, peripheral artery disease (PAD), varicose veins, Raynaud's disease, smoking, blood clots, and even age. (The walls of your blood vessels tend to get thicker and less elastic with age.)
- **Diabetes:** In addition to affecting circulation, diabetes can cause nerve damage, which means you may not feel a wound. If you don't know you have a wound, you can't take proper care of the area. If the diabetes is not under control, there may also be high levels of sugar in the blood, which can also delay healing.
- **Poor diet:** During healing, your body has a greatly increased need for hydration (water) and protein. Failure to provide these necessities can slow healing.
- **Pressure: Swelling** (extra fluid in the tissues) means the excess fluid presses on the blood vessels, decreasing the blood supply (circulation) to the area that needs healing. The fluid will need to be removed so healing can begin. **Immobility** can also cause pressure. If a person is not moving, their body weight rests on a few pressure points, depending on their position. This lack of movement can cause such trauma to the skin that it can actually create a wound (called bedsores or decubitus ulcers). The immobility may be due to paralysis or the need to stay in bed. Poor circulation means the damaged tissues don't get the oxygen they need for the healing process. Consistently repositioning/moving the patient's body can help restore circulation to the area so it can heal.

Delayed wound healing means that a wound fails to heal, heals slowly, has trouble staying closed, or heals but recurs. An *open wound* is any break in the skin including cuts, scrapes, punctures, surgical incisions, and burns that have caused the skin to open. If there is an injury that causes bleeding, bruising, or other tissue or organ damage under the skin but doesn't break the skin, it is known as a *closed wound*.

What you can do

- ✓ If you have a wound that isn't healing well, tell your doctor right away.
- ✓ Wash your hands with soap for at least 30 seconds before and after you change a bandage or dressing on a wound
- ✓ Remove old bandages/dressings carefully; if you pull hard, you may open the wound up again.
- ✓ Clean wounds every day following the directions from your doctor. Rinse after washing and gently pat dry (don't rub to dry)
- ✓ Don't use antiseptic creams, washes or sprays unless your doctor told you to do so.
- ✓ Don't take any drugs that interfere with the healing process. Ask your doctor what drugs to avoid for a while.
- ✓ Healing wounds may be itchy. Don't scratch or pick at your wounds.
- ✓ Always use new, clean supplies when bandaging a wound.
- ✓ Eat properly! Give your body the fuel it needs to heal such as extra calories, proteins, and vitamins A and C. Eat foods that promote healing such as citrus fruits, green leafy vegetables, whole grains, lean meat, fish, and eggs.
- ✓ Exercise increases blood flow and speeds healing. Talk with your doctor about what exercises may be helpful to you.
- ✓ Do not smoke or use tobacco products.
- ✓ Manage any chronic condition(s) you may have (such as diabetes)