Fundamentals of First Aid: Bleeding, Cuts, and Wounds



What’s at Stake?

When your skin is cut, pierced or scraped, blood vessels in the area are damaged or opened. This causes you to bleed. Bleeding is the body’s response to damage to skin, bone or internal organs. Sometimes if the skin damage is only minimal there will not be any bleeding, but these injuries are often very painful.

For the skin damage, bleeding helps to clean out a wound and blood starts to clot which closes the skin again. However, sometimes the damage to the blood vessels in the skin, or other body part, is so large, there may be excessive bleeding. This can cause the body to go into shock or to lose so much blood the person dies.

If a person is bleeding profusely, be on the lookout for symptoms of shock. Cold, clammy skin, a weakened pulse, and loss of consciousness can all indicate that a person is about to go into shock from blood loss. Even in cases of moderate blood loss, the bleeding person may feel lightheaded or nauseous.

What’s the Danger?

You can’t always see how serious a cut or wound is just by the amount it bleeds. Serious injuries can bleed very little, but cuts on the head, face, and mouth often bleed a lot. This is because those areas contain a lot of blood vessels.

Abdominal and chest wounds can be quite serious. This is because internal organs may be damaged. This can cause internal bleeding as well as shock.

Before you begin to treat an injury, you should identify its severity as best you can. There are some situations in which you shouldn’t try to administer any kind of first aid at all. If you suspect that there’s internal bleeding or if there’s an embedded object surrounding the site of the injury, immediately call 911 or your local emergency services.

How to Protect Yourself

6 easy ways to manage bleeding, cuts, and wounds

1. **Keep yourself safe**

- Call 911 1st in an emergency.
- Assess the scene and proceed with care only if it’s safe to do so.
- Put on proper personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect yourself from blood and other potentially infectious materials (OPIM).

2. **To call 911 or not to call**
   Call 911 if:

- bleeding is severe;
- you suspect internal bleeding;
- there is an abdominal or chest wound;
- bleeding can’t be stopped after 10 minutes of firm and steady pressure;
- blood spurts out of wound;
- you are not sure if the person needs EMS care
  – better to be safe than sorry.

3. **Help the injured person**

- Lie down.
- Keep warm.
- Keep calm.

4. **Clear the wound area**

- Wear disposable protective gloves if available.
- Remove clothing or debris on the wound.
- Leave large or deeply embedded objects.
- Don’t attempt to clean the wound or probe it.

5. **Try to stop the bleeding**

- Put a sterile bandage, clean cloth or gauze on the wound.
- Press the bandage firmly with your palm to control bleeding.
- Keep the pressure on until the bleeding stops. This takes about 10 minutes – do not be tempted to lift the bandage to check!
- If blood soaks through the material, don’t remove it. Put more cloth or gauze on top of it and continue to apply pressure.
- If the wound is on the arm or leg, raise limb above the heart, if possible, to help slow bleeding.
- Maintain pressure by binding the wound with a thick bandage or a piece of clean cloth and secure with tape. Do not put direct pressure on an eye injury or embedded object.
- Do not apply a tourniquet unless you have been trained. A wrongly applied tourniquet can cause significant and lasting damage to the limb.

6. **Don’t need 911?**

- Wash the wound with clean, warm, slightly soapy water and a clean cloth. Do not use iodine or hydrogen peroxide.
- Rinse it well under running water to rinse any debris and soap out.
- Pat it dry with the cloth and cover with a dressing.

- You can use an antiseptic ointment if you wish.
- Keep the wound covered with a dressing or bandage.
- If the wound becomes increasingly painful, or if the area around the wound becomes hot, red and/swollen, seek medical advice.

Final Word

It is normal for a person to bleed if they suffer a cut or wound. However, if the cut or wound is significant this can lead to serious bleeding and blood loss.