

CottageHouseCall

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Wound Care Giving your body's healing powers a helping hand

Have you ever watched a scar heal and marveled at the power your body has to repair itself? Or worried over a cut or sore that simply won't go away? The body's ability to heal after illness or injury is a complex process. Many chronic diseases or conditions can compromise our body's restorative capabilities. Unhealed wounds can not only diminish quality of life, but also raise the risk of additional infection and complications. For this reason, wound care is a critical part of disease management or surgical recovery – and a growing medical specialty.

Approximately five million Americans suffer from chronic wounds that will not heal or heal slowly, from accidents, burns, surgery or disease. Chronic wounds are most often found among the senior population, patients who are bed-ridden, and individuals who suffer from diseases that affect the circulation and skin, such as diabetes or peripheral artery disease (PAD).

According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, diabetes affects 23.6 million Americans or 7.8 percent of the population, and one-third of all diabetics suffer from lower extremity wounds or PAD. These wounds increase the likelihood of foot problems and the potential for amputation. Other conditions that can lead to slow-healing wounds include traumatic injury, complications after surgery, congestive heart failure, lymphedema, and compromised immune systems, including HIV or AIDS infection.

Many hospitals have a wound care team, center or clinic, with specialists trained in advanced therapies that help to speed the healing process and promote or rebuild skin integrity. Chronic wounds that are treated in this way include diabetic skin sores, pressure sores, persistent skin irritations, vessel disease wounds, surgery wound breakdown, traumatic wounds, burns, venous insufficiency, radiation injuries, spinal injury wounds and other non-healing wounds. Many of these wounds become problematic due to limited blood flow in the area, which can slow the body's healing process.

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Wound care treatments include transcutaneous oxygen measurement, dressing changes, hyperbaric oxygen therapy and wound debridement (removal of dead tissue). These treatments differ from the standard care a patient would receive after surgery or in the course of chronic disease treatment, because they involve specialized therapies administered in conjunction with other medical or surgical treatment for the skin condition. It may include special dressings or wraps, debridement (the removal of dead or damaged tissue), bioengineered tissue substitutes or hyperbaric oxygen therapy to invigorate oxygen-starved tissues and promote healing.

A patient's doctor generally refers a patient to a wound care team or treatment center where specialists evaluate the wound and review the patient's health and medical history. Tests may be conducted to learn more about the patient's blood flow and tissue oxygenation, as well as determine if there is any infection. The team then develops a treatment program based on the patient's individual needs and is part of the patient's comprehensive medical treatment with the primary care doctor.

Once the wound is healed, follow-up care is important and should be in conjunction with any care the patient may be receiving for the condition that originally caused the wound, such as diabetes or hypertension.

For more information about wound care, visit www.hospitalwebsite.com or the American Diabetes Association (<http://www.diabetes.org/home.jsp>).

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We hope this issue of CottageHouseCall has been helpful to you. Please call again.