DO NOT FORGET

ALWAYS follow your health care provider’s instructions. Keep your bandages on and change or reinforce your bandage if it becomes loose.

Contact your health care provider:

- If you believe that you have an infection, contact them right away, and don’t wait
- If you have uncontrolled bleeding from your wound
- Your wound is deep or has jagged edges
- You were cut by a rusty or dirty object and have not had a tetanus shot in the past 5 years
- There is something in your wound that will not easily rinse out
- If you notice signs of infection: an increase in redness, warmth, swelling, drainage, odor, pain and/or fever, chills, nausea or vomiting
- If you are diabetic and have an unusual increase in blood glucose
- Your wound just will not heal

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Did you know there are germs all over our skin?

Our skin is covered with them, and this is normal! Having germs on your skin, even in a wound, does not mean you have an infection. The number and type of germs, as well as your ability to fight them off, will determine whether or not an infection will occur.

Skin is the body’s ‘armor’. This ‘armor’ can protect against germs entering your body. Having an open wound, no matter how small, increases your risk for an infection because it provides germs with a way to get into your body. It is important to keep your home, your clothes and your body as clean as possible to prevent an infection.

What is a wound infection?

Your wound is considered infected when the amount or type of germs in your wound is too much for your body to fight. An infection can slow healing or make your wound worse.

Infections can be mild to severe: A wound infection can be mild and confined to the wound itself. If untreated, some infections can become serious, causing a “whole body” illness. No two infections are the same, so if you see and feel the signs of an infection, tell your health care provider right away. The best course of infection treatment will be prescribed by your health care provider.

What does a wound infection look and feel like?

- Increase in pain that doesn’t go away
- Increased redness and warmth in and around the wound
- Increased swelling around the wound
- Increase in wound drainage and odor
- Fever, chills, nausea or vomiting
- Wound may slow or stop healing
- If you are diabetic, an unusual increase in blood glucose (finger stick)

Is my wound infected?

Inflammation, mild redness and warmth, is a normal response your body has to dealing with trauma and can sometimes be confused with infection. Your health care provider understands the difference and will help identify if your wound has become infected and determine the correct treatment to fight the infection.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say “Handwashing is easy to do and it’s one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of many types of infection and illness…” They even teach us how to do it:

- Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap
- Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails
- Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice
- Rinse your hands well under clean, running water
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them

To reduce the risk of infection when changing your wound bandages:

- Wash hands with soap and water before and after dressings are changed
- Wear disposable gloves and change them if they become soiled
- Clean any equipment/surfaces that will be used
- Always follow your healthcare provider’s instructions on the use of supplies and bandages