

Skin tears

Information for residents, families and carers



A skin tear is a break or tear in the outside layers of the skin. The skin may peel back or it can come off completely.

Skin tears can be common on arms, hands and legs. Large skin tears can take a long time to heal.

Your skin can become very dry and fragile as you age. Even a small bump or knock can cause your skin to tear.

Take extra care to protect and look after your skin to help prevent skin tears.

Ways to prevent skin tears

- Use a soap-free body wash or wipes that don't have added perfume. They are much better for your skin than soap and won't dry it out. You can buy these products at the supermarket or pharmacy.
- Use moisturiser on your skin twice a day as dry skin is easy to damage.
- When you dry your skin, pat it gently. Don't rub it hard.
- Eat healthy food (fruit and vegetables) and have plenty of drinks (unless you have a fluid limit).

How to avoid damage to your skin

- Keep the nails on your fingers and toes cut short and smooth.
- Don't wear jewellery that could tear your skin.
- Pad or cushion sharp edges on furniture and things like walkers and wheelchairs.
- Make sure there is enough light. You need to see where you are walking so you can avoid bumping into furniture.
- Try not to rush (especially to the toilet). This is when most skin tears happen.
- If it is not too hot, wear clothes with long sleeves and long pants to protect your skin.
- If your skin is very easy to damage you may wish to use extra padding (these are often called limb protectors) to protect your skin.
- Don't use tapes (like sticking plasters) on your skin. They can cause damage.

Ways to care for skin tears

Staff will know how to look after skin tears. Let them know straight away if you injure yourself.

Any bleeding will need to be stopped and the area gently cleaned with water or salt water (saline). If possible staff will replace the skin flap by carefully rolling it back over the wound and then cover it with a non-stick dressing.

Working together

You and your family are important members of the care team. You know what is normal for you.

Let staff know straight away if you get a skin tear or notice any damage to your skin. Don't wait to see if it gets better – it is always best to get help early.

Working together with staff can help to keep you healthy and out of hospital. Talk to staff and ask questions. They need your help to give you the best care.

Questions to ask staff

- Can you help me check my skin?
- What are the best products to use to keep my skin healthy?



Want to know more?

'Skin tears made easy' fact sheet <www.woundsinternational.com>

Disclaimer: This health information is for general purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.

To receive this publication in an accessible format email acqiu@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

© State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, February 2016. ISBN 978-0-7311-6809-5
Available at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/ageing-and-aged-care/residential-aged-care/safety-and-quality/participating-with-consumers> (1507022)