

WOUND MANAGEMENT



Prompt and correct attention to wounds is vitally important to enhance the rate of healing and to help prevent secondary problems, such as infection.

Thorough cleaning and flushing of wounds is vital. Strong disinfectants such as undiluted iodine, must not be used on wounds, as these can damage the soft tissues and prevent healing. Either use a 1:50 dilution of Hibi-scrub, or use a sterile saline solution. Avoid the use of wound powders and ointments particularly in deep wounds. These tend to cause more harm than good and “clog up” the wound.

Dressings should be ideally absorbent and non-adhesive. This helps to provide a moist wound environment, which promotes healing and the absence of adhesion prevents the dressing sticking and damaging fragile skin.

Important steps in wound management are:

1. **Clipping** of hair around the wound to expose the full extent of the damage. Before clipping, the wound should ideally be packed with a water-soluble gel, for example, K Y jelly or Nu-gel, to prevent contaminating the wound with hair.
2. **Flushing** the wound, ideally with lots of warm saline to wash away dirt and bacteria. Flushing with too high a pressure will push bacteria into the wound and can damage tissues. Too low a pressure will not remove dirt and bacteria. The ideal pressure can be achieved by flushing saline via a 30-50ml syringe, with a needle attached.
3. **Exploration** of the wound to assess wound size and depth. When doing so it is very important to appreciate what other structures may have been damaged, in particular joints, tendons and tendon sheaths, ligaments, large blood vessels and nerves. Never assume small wounds are nothing to worry about—a small puncture wound near an elbow may lead to an infected elbow joint if left untreated, whereas a large dramatic incised wound on the hind quarters may heal rapidly without complications.
4. **Debridement** of the wound. This involves removal of contaminated/infected tissue. Without this, wounds will not heal.
5. **Closure** of wounds. Wounds more than four hours old are deemed “infected”, i.e. bacteria have had time to take hold and multiply within the wound. Wounds heal best if sutured as soon after injury as possible. Some wounds however are best left un-sutured, if for example they are very deep or contaminated, as trapping any bacteria will only delay healing.
6. **Bandaging** wounds provides support, reduces the movement of the area and reduces infection getting to the wound. The frequency of bandage changes depends on the size and site of the wound.

REMEMBER: wounds causing acute lameness, profuse bleeding, exposure of vital structures or proximity to vital structures (joints, tendons etc), require IMMEDIATE veterinary attention. The sooner a wound is treated the better the outcome.

Please refer to our “First Aid Kit Fact sheet” for some useful hints on products to have in your first aid kit at home.