

## How wounds heal?

Wound healing is a complex process. How a wound heals depends on the type of injury, its depth, size, location and each person's individual circumstances. Wounds go through number of stages until they heal.

Chronic wounds take longer to heal as there has been more tissue damage and they heal from the bottom of the wound to the top.

## Get the right advice

When you seek advice or treatment for a wound that won't heal you are entitled to receive the best quality care. You should talk to your GP if you are concerned about a wound that isn't healing. In some instances your doctor might feel your wound needs specialist advice and they may refer you to:

- Specialist wound clinics
- Hospital wound management clinics
- Hospital wound management specialist nurses
- Community nursing services (some have specialist wound management nurses)
- Podiatrists
- Pharmacists

For more information about wounds  
and wound healing visit

[woundaware.com.au](http://woundaware.com.au)

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**Be Wound Aware**  
Patient Information

## What is a wound?

A wound is any damage or break in the surface of the skin. Wounds can be accidental, surgical or occur because of underlying disease (such as diabetes or vascular disease) or changes to the skin that occur with ageing.

## What are chronic wounds?

Acute wounds usually heal quickly and without complication. Chronic wounds are those that take more than three months to heal or are recurring (i.e. almost or completely heal and then come back) but they can heal with proper treatment.

## Types of chronic wounds

There are some chronic wounds that occur due to underlying medical conditions. Some skin conditions may also develop into a wound. Some examples of common chronic wounds are:

- **Pressure Injuries:** or bed sores can range from small superficial wounds to large deep wounds the depth of which may extend down to bone.
- **Diabetic related foot disease** is a complication of diabetes. If not treated (eg by a podiatrist) they can lead to amputation.
- **Leg ulcers:** A leg ulcer is a wound between the knee and ankle joint that is slow to heal because of problems with the veins in the leg.
- **Skin tears:** where there is a separation of skin layers following a shear, friction or blunt force injury. They mainly occur in elderly people whose skin has become frailer due to the aging process.

- **Burns** are injuries to the skin or deeper tissues that are generally caused by heat but can also be due to radiation, radioactivity, electricity, friction or contact with chemicals. Burns range in severity from those affecting superficial skin layers (first degree burns) through to those involving deeper tissues such as muscle and bone (fourth degree burns).

*An example of a chronic wound not related to underlying disease is the Buruli ulcer. It occurs in people of any age and causes destruction of skin and other tissues, in some cases down to the bone. How the disease spreads is unknown making prevention and treatment difficult.*

## Risk factors of chronic wounds

While anyone can get a chronic wound there are people who are at greater risk of chronic wounds or wounds that are hard to heal. These include:

- People who are elderly or have poor mobility
- People with diabetes
- People with cardiovascular diseases
- People with renal disease
- People who are obese

## Signs of a not healing wound

If you develop any of the following signs, make an appointment to see your doctor or health care practitioner:

- The area around the wound becomes red, swollen and hot
- The wound becomes painful
- Fluid from the wound becomes discoloured, thick or excessive
- The wound has not noticeably decreased in size over 4-6 weeks (even a small wound)
- The wound bleeds regularly or profusely
- The wound becomes black or yellow



- You feel unwell or develop a temperature

If you develop any of the following signs don't delay, make an appointment to see your doctor, health care practitioner or local hospital emergency department.



### Pain and heat

Wounds that are red, swollen, hot to touch and very painful



### Odour

Wounds with a strange or unpleasant smell



### Excess Fluid

Wounds that have a thick, yellowish fluid



### Slow healing

Wounds taking longer than a month to heal



### Chronic Disease & Ageing

People over 65 years and/or with chronic diseases such as diabetes, are more at risk of wound complications