

Wounds

Definition

A wound is any injury to the skin or underlying tissues that disrupts the normal structure and function of the body. Wounds can be caused by various factors, including trauma, surgery, burns, pressure, or chronic conditions.

Pathophysiology

Wounds can damage the skin, subcutaneous tissue, muscle, bone, or organs, leading to bleeding, inflammation, and tissue damage. The body's natural healing process involves several stages, including hemostasis, inflammation, proliferation, and remodeling, which aim to repair the damaged tissues and restore the normal function of the affected area.

- 1. Hemostasis:** The first stage of wound healing is hemostasis. It starts immediately after the injury and is the body's natural process to stop bleeding. The damaged blood vessels constrict to minimize blood loss, and platelets accumulate at the site of injury to form a clot. This clotting mechanism seals the wound and provides a framework for the subsequent stages of healing.
- 2. Inflammation:** The second stage of wound healing is inflammation. It starts within hours of injury and lasts up to four days. Inflammation is the body's natural response to injury and involves the recruitment of immune cells to the site of the wound. The immune cells remove any debris or bacteria from the wound and create a clean environment for the subsequent stages of healing.
- 3. Proliferation:** The third stage of wound healing is proliferation. It starts within a few days of injury and can last up to three weeks. During proliferation, new cells and blood vessels are formed to replace the damaged tissue. Fibroblasts, a type of cell found in connective tissue, produce collagen, which forms the framework for the new tissue growth.
- 4. Remodeling:** The fourth and final stage of wound healing is remodeling. It starts within a few weeks of injury and can last up to two years. During remodeling, the new tissue that was formed during the proliferation stage matures and strengthens. The scar tissue that forms during this stage is typically weaker than the surrounding tissue and may require protection during the healing process.

However, certain factors, such as infection, poor nutrition, or impaired blood flow, can delay or impair the healing process and lead to chronic or non-healing wounds.

Wounds

Stages

Ulcers, particularly chronic wounds such as pressure ulcers or venous ulcers, go through different stages of healing. The stages of ulcer development and healing are commonly classified using the "Wound Bed Preparation" model. The stages include:

Stage 1: In this stage, the skin is intact, but there may be localized redness or discoloration. The affected area may feel warmer or cooler than the surrounding skin, and it may be painful or itchy. In individuals with darker skin tones, the ulcer may appear blue or purple. At this stage, the ulcer has not broken through the skin.

Stage 2: The ulcer progresses to this stage when the topmost layer of the skin (epidermis) is broken, resulting in a shallow open sore or blister. The ulcer may be pink or red and can have a fluid-filled or moist appearance. It is important to note that stage 2 ulcers do not extend beyond the dermis (the deeper layer of the skin).

Stage 3: At this stage, the ulcer extends deeper into the skin layers, reaching the subcutaneous tissue. The ulcer appears as a crater-like wound with a depth that can vary. The wound bed may contain yellowish or slough-like tissue, which indicates dead or non-viable tissue. The surrounding skin may be discoloured, and there can be signs of infection or odour.

Stage 4: In this stage, the ulcer is significantly deep, extending beyond the subcutaneous tissue to potentially involve muscle, tendons, or bones. The wound may have an irregular shape and can be covered with slough or eschar (dry, black, or brown necrotic tissue). The surrounding skin may exhibit signs of infection, and the ulcer can be extremely painful.

Unstageable: Some ulcers are classified as unstageable when the wound bed is covered with slough or eschar, making it difficult to determine the depth and stage of the ulcer. The presence of eschar may need to be debrided (removed) to assess the wound properly.

Additionally, there are two other categories related to ulcer classification:

Deep Tissue Injury (DTI): DTIs are characterized by intact skin with discoloration, usually purple or maroon. These injuries may evolve into open ulcers as the damage progresses.

Suspected Deep Tissue Injury: This category is used when there is an area of localized discoloration, often deep red or purple, which indicates possible tissue damage. However, the full extent of the injury is not yet visible.

Wounds

Types/Forms

Common types of wounds include:

- Abrasions (skin scrapes)
- Lacerations (cuts or tears)
- Puncture wounds (such as from nails or needles)
- Avulsions (skin or tissue torn away from the body)
- Burns (thermal, chemical, or electrical)
- Pressure ulcers (bedsores or decubitus ulcers)
- Surgical wounds (incisions or excisions)
- Chronic wounds (such as diabetic foot ulcers or venous leg ulcers)

Causes

Wounds can be caused by various factors, including:

- Accidents (such as falls, cuts, or burns)
- Medical procedures (such as surgery or biopsy)
- Chronic conditions (such as diabetes or peripheral vascular disease)
- Infections (such as cellulitis or abscesses)
- Age-related changes (such as skin thinning or decreased blood flow)
- Gender-related factors (such as hormonal changes or pregnancy)

Clinical Manifestations

The signs and symptoms of wounds may vary depending on the type and severity of the injury.

Some common signs and symptoms include:

- Pain or tenderness in the affected area
- Swelling, redness, or warmth
- Bleeding or oozing of fluid
- Decreased range of motion or function
- Fever or chills (in case of infection)
- Foul odor or drainage (in case of chronic or infected wounds)

Diagnostic Criteria

The diagnosis of wounds may require various diagnostic tests, including:

- Physical examination (such as inspection and palpation of the wound)
- Blood tests (such as complete blood count or inflammatory markers)
- Imaging tests (such as X-rays, CT scans, or ultrasounds)
- Microbiological tests (such as wound culture or sensitivity testing)

Wounds

Treatment:

The treatment of wounds may vary depending on the type and severity of the injury. Some common treatments include:

- First aid measures (such as cleaning, covering, and elevating the wound)
- Topical medications (such as antibiotics, antiseptics, or corticosteroids)
- Systemic medications (such as analgesics, antibiotics, or immunosuppressants)
- Surgical procedures (such as wound debridement, closure, or reconstruction)
- Advanced therapies (such as hyperbaric oxygen therapy or negative pressure wound therapy)

Contraindications/Cautions

- Any known allergy to wound care products or medications used in wound care
- Active bleeding or infection in the wound
- Necrotic tissue or foreign objects present in the wound
- Underlying conditions that can affect wound healing, such as diabetes or autoimmune diseases
- Poor circulation or peripheral arterial disease
- Use caution when treating wounds in pregnant or breastfeeding women, as some medications may be harmful to the fetus or infant.

Affected Age Groups

All age groups can be affected by wounds, but older adults and young children may be more susceptible to certain types of wounds or complications related to wound healing.

Nursing Assessment

- Assess the location, size, and depth of the wound
- Check for signs of infection, such as redness, warmth, swelling, or drainage
- Evaluate the amount and type of exudate (fluid) present
- Assess the patient's pain level and response to pain management interventions
- Consider the patient's overall health status and any underlying conditions that may impact wound healing.

Wounds

Nursing Diagnoses

- Impaired skin/tissue integrity
- Risk for infection
- Acute or chronic pain
- Impaired physical mobility
- Anxiety

Nursing Management

- Clean the wound using appropriate techniques and solutions
- Apply appropriate dressings or other wound care products based on the type and severity of the wound
- Monitor for signs of infection and adjust treatment as needed
- Manage pain with appropriate medications and non-pharmacologic interventions
- Educate the patient on proper wound care techniques and signs of potential complications
- Encourage healthy lifestyle habits to support overall wound healing, such as good nutrition and adequate hydration.
- Consider the use of topical or systemic antibiotics if the wound is infected or at high risk for infection
- Use advanced wound care techniques such as negative pressure wound therapy or hyperbaric oxygen therapy if appropriate
- Consider the use of surgical debridement or other interventions to remove necrotic tissue and promote healing.