

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

A.E. HAAS, M.D.

Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Wounds - Treatment with antibiotics

Any time the skin is broken bacteria have a way to get into your body. When they get inside your tissues an infection results. Microorganisms as bacteria normally live on your skin. This is not an infection. We call this a colonization. When these normal inhabitants get inside from broken skin they cause infection. Most infections are not from bacteria that live on the object that caused the trauma. Most infections are from your own bacteria already sitting on you. The most common skin inhabitant is staph.

One reason we try to close wounds with stitches or skin grafting is to minimize the amount of time bacteria can get into your body. Every day a wound is left open is another chance that gangrene may set in. Yet, we do not routinely put patients on antibiotics. In the past all patients got antibiotics. The bacteria then became resistant to the medications and then no antibiotics were available that could fight the infection.

Today we watch the wound and culture the area to monitor the bacterial count. Your body can fight off a couple of bacteria all by itself. When the count goes up we start the medications. The culture not only gives us an idea of how many bacteria are present but also tells us what antibiotics are best to use. Prescriptions are usually for a week or two. One cannot just keep taking antibiotics all the time. This may be harmful by itself.

Wounds cannot heal if infected. Sometimes there is a lot of dead tissue in the wound. Antibiotics do not travel well from the bloodstream into dead tissues. Bacteria thrive there and keep wounds from healing. Small surgical procedures are sometimes needed to get wounds cleaned up to the point that the antibiotics can work.

Most medications work by delivery to the target area through the bloodstream. When circulation is poor so is the delivery of medications. A prescription medication like Silvadene Cream has the ability to penetrate tissues through open wounds and kills bacteria directly. We use this medication often.

Antibiotics are sometimes given prophylactically. There is no infection but we give them anyway. When somebody has an artificial heart valve for example, they must be given antibiotics before having even a dental procedure. In the wound clinic we always give antibiotics prophylactically when a skin graft is performed. For the first few days the graft is very susceptible to infection even though the wound is clean at the time of the procedure. The new graft is protected from becoming infected.

Antibiotics are very important in the treatment of wounds but should not be used indiscriminantly. They could be more damaging than useful if improperly administered. Most complex wound patients do however require antibiotic use.

**The above represents the opinion of A. E. Haas, M.D.
Venice Plastic Surgery, Venice Wound Center, Lakeside Medical Center**

Just call us directly. No referral needed unless required by your insurance company

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