

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

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Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Wounds - Treatment - Medicated Bandaging

People want to know the types of bandages used in wound clinics. There are many to choose from. Some are prescription and some are not. The doctor needs a lot of choices since there is no one or two dressings that work well for every patient.

Dressings used after surgical procedures are generally used to keep the area covered and clean. Exposure to germs is minimized by dressings. They also absorb some of the bleeding and oozing of blood after a surgery. When placed on with elastic tape the bandage may help to slow any surgical bleeding. Pressure slows blood flow. A bulky bandage or a reinforced one aids to splint a joint to prevent movement. These larger dressings may also be a buffer to protect the wound from outside forces like a bump into the edge of the car door or the dishwasher door.

Dressings must be done properly or they may worsen the situation. The most common bandaging problem I see is the application of "Ace" bandages, those elastic brown rolls people use on their knees and ankles. They should be a prescription item in my book. The problem is that they are often applied over a wound and act as a tourniquet. Swelling occurs below this level that may actually worsen things. To prevent this a dressing or wrap needed at the knee level should start at the toes and go all the way up and over the knee. A tourniquet may cause the development of a blood clot in the leg. This is a potentially lethal situation if the clot travels to the lungs.

Remember that a tight dressing puts pressure on a wound. Pressure diminishes blood flow. A little less blood when circulation is perfectly normal is not a problem but a little less when circulation is already poor can have disastrous results. The proper application of dressings is critical in the treatment of wounds.

Unna's Boot dressings are a type of medicated wrap used on superficial leg wounds with swelling problems. The ideal patient also has problems with their venous circulation as apposed to arterial problems. Like Ace wraps these Unna's wraps must be started at the toes and applied up over the wound area with gradually decreasing pressure or tightness.

Xeroform® gauze is like a Vaseline® mesh dressing but less greasy. I use Xeroform especially after skin grafts to keep the dressing from sticking to the wound. Skin grafts have been inadvertently removed because they stuck to the dressing instead of the patient. The mesh feature helps let the oozing blood and body fluids get from the wound to the absorbent dressing and otherwise keeps the wound more dry. The wound should be damp not wet otherwise they get macerated.

Many are familiar with Scarlet Red® an older medicated gauze dressing. It is supposed to promote healing. I do not believe it is very effective but I occasionally use it when others things have failed. A doctor must be familiar with the new and the old.

Heat treatment is new. This involves the intermittent application of a heating pad like dressing that warms the injury site. Your arms and legs are cooler than the central body temperature. People think the whole body is at 98.6 degrees but the hands and feet are probably only at 85 degrees. Heat treatment warms the extremity wound closer to 98 degrees. The object is to get normal core body temperatures, not to warm it past that point.

Bandaging wounds is a science and must be performed correctly by qualified, experience people. This is most important particularly in those delicate wound care patients.

**The above represents the opinion of A. E. Haas, M.D.
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Just call us directly. No referral needed unless required by your insurance company

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