

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

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Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Misconceptions - Soaking in the ocean and pool is good.

Closed wounds and infected, intact skin should not be soaked. Often patients ask if they should soak their wound or infected leg. Putting your leg in water will actually cause it to swell. This is detrimental. Also, having your leg in a dependent position makes the blood pool in your legs. This is bad. Types of injuries where the skin surface is intact should usually be kept dry and the body part elevated as possible.

Open wounds need washing but not soaking. Washing with soap helps remove bacteria from the wound. They rinse away with the flow of water. The water is not in contact with the tissue for long so it does not hurt things. Washing should only be performed for a minute or two. Soaking in a tub keeps the bacteria there and really increases swelling. The skin also becomes macerated from the water. This is bad. Burn units previously used huge pools to wash burn patients. We are going to big showers now. You do not want to be soaking in a pool of bacteria then spread them to other areas.

Many doctors are still telling patients to soak in saline or salt water solutions. This may be good on rare occasions but salty ocean water is no good at all. The ocean is full of bad germs and can only worsen your wound. One should not swim or even go near the ocean or beach with an open sore. I consider the home pool dirty as well. With kids playing in there and others coughing and spitting we cannot consider this area clean. Besides, soaking in plain water itself is toxic to human tissues and will make any wound worse. A boy with a wound died recently from an infection picked up while swimming in a pond.

On those rare occasions when an area must be soaked there are special fluids to use. We often use a salt solution that is something like human fluids. It is called normal saline. There is a better solution that I have used in the operating room for years. It is called Lactated Ringers solution. This fluid is very much like real human tissue fluids and has only recently been available in a bottle to use for irrigating wounds and soaking. I am trying to get doctors to use this fluid on their patients instead of plain saline solution. A prescription is needed.

Along the same line of reasoning is personal hygiene care. I recommend a shower instead of a bathtub cleansing. The thinking is to wash off and remove dead skin, dirt and bacteria, not to soak in them. A proper shower with built in chair may also be safer than trying to get in and out of a tub. Generally the shower uses less water. Why not conserve our resources as well.

In all cases use lukewarm water. Never use hot water. Some people think it sterilizes their skin or their wound. This is not the case. Water heaters should be set to no more than 120 or 130 degrees. Consult your doctor before you soak anything.

**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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