



First Aid Myths & Mistakes

First aid is defined as “emergency care or treatment given to an ill or injured person before regular medical aid can be obtained.”¹ In reality, the term is used to cover a wide range of actions – from treating very minor injuries (such as those covered here) to the provision of life supporting first aid for major medical emergencies, like heart attack. By identifying familiar (and not so familiar) first aid myths and mistakes and following them with fact, [ASHI](#) hopes to help people better tend to the minor injuries of everyday life.

The following first aid myths & mistakes are based on folklore, superstition², and questions from (or the anecdotal remarks of) students in first aid classes as reported by ASHI authorized first aid instructors. The origins of some of these “treatments” go back centuries and many still believe them to be true. However, scientific proof for the majority is nonexistent. Where scientific support exists, it tends to be weak – at least by the standards of western medicine.

ASHI strongly recommends that you take a course in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid. These courses are available through authorized American Safety and Health Institute [Training Centers](#) as well as other nationally recognized organizations.

MYTHS: Stopping Bleeding From Minor Wounds

- Apply brown sugar
- Apply a paste of flour and vinegar
- Apply dusty cobwebs
- Bind with a leaf of natural tobacco
- Rub in soot from a chimney
- Apply a spread of dried sage leaves
- Apply browned flour
- Apply salt
- Cover with sugar
- Cover with the lining of an egg
- Apply wet tea leaves
- Rub with charcoal

- Apply ink
- Apply vinegar water

MYTHS: Wound Cleaning, Infection Prevention & Healing

Clean with:

- Hydrogen Peroxide
- Thimerosal
- Alcohol

Heal or Prevent Infection with:

- Honey
- Lemon juice
- Heat Lamps or Hair Dryers
- Air (leave wound uncovered)
- Paste of sugar and soap
- Paste of lard, beeswax and resin
- Turpentine and salt

FACTS: Stopping Bleeding, Wound Cleaning, & Infection Prevention

The best way to treat minor wounds is to gently wash them with mild soap and warm water, apply an antibiotic ointment to help prevent skin infection, and then cover them with a bandage to keep them moist, which helps minimize scarring. Minor wounds usually stop bleeding on their own. If they don't, apply direct pressure to the wound with a sterile 3x3 gauze pad until it stops.

If the bleeding is heavy or continues to flow, apply additional gauze pads and maintain direct pressure over the wound. Call 911 for cuts that are deep, continue bleeding, may require stitches, or scrapes with imbedded particles that can't be flushed away. Consult your doctor if the wound does not heal in, one week or less or if any of the following warning signs of infection appear: increased pain, redness, swelling, or a yellow discharge from the wound.

- Hydrogen Peroxide
 - The risk/benefit of antiseptics in wound care has not been scientifically established. Substances such as hydrogen peroxide, iodine or an

iodine-containing cleansers while acceptable for cleaning INTACT skin, may irritate living cells and inhibit healing in open wounds^{3,4,5}

- Thimerosal
 - Products containing these ingredients for these uses cannot be introduced into interstate commerce after October 19, 1998⁶.
- Alcohol
 - Isopropyl alcohol may be used on intact skin as a cleanser with no adverse effect; however it should never be introduced into the wound as it injure tissue and delay healing.⁷⁸

MYTHS: Stopping Nosebleeds

- Hold a nickel or dime between the lower lip and teeth
- Hold a stiff piece of cardboard firmly between the teeth
- Put the end of a key in your nose, then tie the key around your neck
- Tie a string around the little finger of the left hand
- Soften a piece of brown wrapping-paper paper in vinegar or chew it, then put it under the upper lip
- Keep a spoon under the tongue
- Count to 50 backward
- Hold both hands above the head
- Placing a wet or cold rag or pour cold water on the back of the neck
- Drop a key, nail, or a pair of scissors down the back of the person's shirt or blouse
- Let your nose bleed on a white rock, then turn the rock over and leave
- Hold a gold ring against the roof of the mouth
- Place a wad of cotton in the nostril
- Press under both ears simultaneously
- Chew gum
- Tip your head back

FACTS: Stopping Nosebleeds

Nosebleeds are rarely dangerous, even though the bleeding may seem excessive. Most will stop with continuous pressure. If a nosebleed is the result of a significant force or there are additional injuries to the head or face, call 911. To stop the flow of blood from a common nosebleed:

- Calm the person down
- Have them sit or stand upright.
- Pinch nose with thumb and forefinger for a full 10 minutes without relieving pressure.
- If the bleeding continues despite these efforts, call 911 or consult a doctor.

MYTHS: Bites & Stings

Snakes

- Cut & Suck
- Place a chew of tobacco on the bite
- Drink whiskey until you are drunk
- Wrap a leaf of natural tobacco around the bitten limb.
- Remove the wing of a live chicken and place it on the bite to draw out the poison.
- Rub mud on the bite
- Rub plantain leaf juice on the bite

Bees & Wasps

- Remove an Insect Singer with Tweezers
- Apply a mixture of vinegar and clay
- Cover with chewed plantain leaves
- Cover with ear wax
- Cover with a piece of lean raw meat
- Rub with a mixture of yellow clay and juice from peppermint leaves
- Rub a slice of onion
- Apply tobacco

Jellyfish or Stingray Sting

- Urinate on it

FACTS: Bites & Stings

Snakes

- Calm and reassure person.
- Keep the affected limb still and below heart level.
- Do not attempt to suck the venom out of the victim.
- Call the Poison Control Center and/or EMS.

Bees & Wasps

- If the stinger is present, do not use tweezers or pinch it with your fingers as this may cause more venom to be injected.
- Try to remove the stinger by scraping or brushing it off with a firm edge, such as a credit card.
- Remove rings and other constricting items as the affected area may swell.
- Clean the wound following the basic principles for Stopping Bleeding, Wound Cleaning, & Infection Prevention (above).
- To reduce pain and swelling, apply ice or a cold pack.
- You may also apply 0.5 percent or 1 percent hydrocortisone cream, or calamine lotion to the bite or sting several times a day until symptoms subside.
- Monitor the bite for signs of infection; increased pain, redness, swelling, or a yellow discharge from the wound.

Jellyfish or Stingray Sting

- Rinse the wound with clean water, then immerse in hottest water tolerable for 30 to 90 minutes.
- Gently extract stinger if present.
- Scrub wound with mild soap and water. Apply a dressing and seek medical help.⁹
- Consider an age appropriate over-the-counter pain reliever as necessary.

MYTHS: Minor Burns

- Apply Ice
- Apply Butter
- Apply Baking Soda
- Apply Lotion or Ointment
- Apply Petroleum Jelly
- Re-burn a Burn
- Pop A Blister
- Apply cow dung

FACTS: Minor Burns (small reddened area)

- Use cool compresses of water as often as needed to relieve pain. This is the most effective and comforting treatment.
- When the pain has subsided, gently clean the burn with cool running water
- Allow the area to dry and apply a Curad® Hydro Heal™ bandage to help the wound heal naturally.
- Be sure to cleanse the wound and change the bandage at least daily or whenever it becomes wet or dirty.
- Consider an age appropriate over-the-counter pain reliever as necessary.
- Consult your doctor if the wound does not heal in, one week or less or if any of the following warning signs of infection appear: increased pain, redness, swelling, or a yellow discharge from the wound.
- Do not use ice or ice-containing compresses as they may further injure the skin.
- Do not break any blisters.
- Do not use adhesive bandages as they will stick to the skin and may further injure it.

¹ Collegiate Dictionary copyright © 2001 by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

² Horses, Mules. The superstitions and folklore you need to make life magnificent... or miserable. <http://www.sandiego-books.com/horses.htm> [20-Dec-01]

³ O'Toole EA, Goel M, Woodley DT. Hydrogen peroxide inhibits human keratinocyte migration. *Dermatol Surg* 1996 Jun;22(6):525-9

⁴ Morris EJ, Dowlen S, Cullen B. J Early clinical experience with topical collagen in vascular wound care. *Wound Ostomy Continence Nurs* 1994 Nov;21(6):247-50

⁵ Howell JM, Chisholm CD. Outpatient wound preparation and care: a national survey. *Ann Emerg Med* 1992 Aug;21(8):976-81

⁶ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Mercury Compounds In Drugs And Food, Available: <http://www.fda.gov/cber/genadmin/merclst.htm> [20-Dec-01]

⁷ Ovington, Liza G. A cleanser is not a cleanser is not a cleanser. Available: <http://www.woundcare.org/newsvol3n1/prpt3.htm> [20-Dec-01]

⁸ Michels, Marilyn, Wound Cleaning Versus Skin Antisepsis Copyright © 2001 by [Virgo Publishing, Inc](http://www.virgo-publishing.com) Available: www.iceinstitute.com/online/OR27.html

⁹ Auerbach, Paul S. Marine Life Trauma. <http://www.diversalertnetwork.org/medical/articles/> © 1980-2001 Divers Alert Network [20-Dec-01]