

DRESSINGS & BANDAGES

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Dressings and bandages are the basic tools used for first aid. As a first aider it is important to know some of the products on the market as well as how to improvise with materials on hand at an emergency scene.

Dressings - are protective coverings to treat wounds, to control bleeding and cover from possible spread and infection (contamination).

Dressings should be:

- As clean as possible, sterilized when possible
- Able to cover wounds
- Absorbent
- Thick and soft - to cater to excessive bleeding and to apply even pressure on a wound
- Lint free and a non-stick material such as gauze, linen and cotton.

Improvising dressing:

Use any available material that is lint-free sterile or clean, preferably white. A towel, sheet, pillow slip, even a clean sanitary pad can be used as a dressing where commercial products are not at hand. Plastic wrap or the packaging from sterile dressings can be used to wrap around a dressing to have an airtight hold. However, a breathable dressing is preferable in most situations. The only major exception being a sucking chest wound.

Applying dressings:

Use the cleanest material, wear gloves and wash hands before and after care to avoid contamination.

Extend the dressing beyond the edges of the wound so it is covered completely.

If blood goes through a dressing, leave it on and cover with more dressings

Secure and seal dressing with tape or bandages

Bandages - are any materials that hold the dressing in place, hold pressure on a wound, as support or to secure a splint. Like dressings, bandages can be bought or improvised.

Using bandages:

- Apply firmly so bleeding is controlled
- Check the circulation beyond the bandage often to make sure the bandage is not too tight
- Make sure bandages are not used as padding or dressings.

Examples of improvised bandages: Tie, belt, scarf, cloth (rolled or folded), fabric cut into a triangle and folded to make a broad or narrow bandage etc.

Head bandage

- Stand behind the casualty. Use a triangular bandage as a whole cloth with a narrow hem folded along the base. Place the centre of the base in the middle of the forehead, close to the eyebrows.
- Bring the point over the top of the head to cover the dressing, and down the back of the head, cross over the point, and around the head to the front. Tie the ends together, using a reef knot, low on the forehead.
- Steady the head with one hand, and gently pull the point down to put the desired amount of pressure on the dressing. Fold the point up toward the top of the head and secure it carefully with a safety pin or tuck it under the back crisscross.

Knee or elbow bandage

- Use a triangular bandage as a whole cloth with a narrow hem folded along the base. Place the centre of the base on the leg below the kneecap with the point toward the top of the leg (or to bandage an elbow, on the forearm with the point toward the shoulder).
- Bring the ends around the joint, crossing over the point in front of the elbow or at the back of the knee.
- Bring the ends up and tie off over the point. Pull the point up to put the right amount of pressure on the dressing and then fold it down and secure it with a safety pin or tuck it under the knot.

Foot or hand bandage

- Use a triangular bandage as a whole cloth. Place it on a flat surface with the point away from the casualty
- Place the foot or hand on the triangular bandage with the toes or fingers toward the point, leaving enough bandage at the ankle or wrist to fully cover the part. Bring the point up and over the foot or hand to rest on the lower leg or wrist.
- Bring the ends alongside the foot of hand and crisscross the folded ends up and around the ankle or wrist. Cross over the point and wrap any extra bandage before trying it off.
- Tie off over the point. If the point extends beyond the knot, pull it up to apply the desired pressure. Fold it downward and tuck under the knot.

Roller bandages - are usually made of gauze like material and are packages as a roll. They are used to hold dressings in place to secure splints.

- Roller bandages can be put on in a simple spiral. Start at the narrow part of the limb, anchor the bandage as directed\
- Place the end of the bandage on a diagonal at the starting point
- Wrap the bandage around the injured part so the corner of the bandage end is left out
- Fold this corner of the bandage over and wrap the bandage around again to cover the corner. Keep wrapping the bandage, overlapping each turn by one quarter to one third of the bandages width. Make full-width overlaps wit the final two or three turns and secure with a safety pin, adhesive tape or by cutting and tying the bandage as shown. Check circulation below the bandage.

Slings - Provide support and protection for an arm. Slings can be commercially bought but be easily improvised with a scarf, belt, necktie or other item that can go around the casualty's neck - any material will do as long as it is sturdy enough to support the arm. You can also support the arm by placing the hand inside a buttoned jacket or by pinning the sleeve of a shirt or jacket to the clothing in the proper position.