



4: THE RISKS OF AN UNTREATED CHRONIC WOUND

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People sometimes ignore wounds or underestimate how serious they are. It's tempting to hope a wound will heal itself over time, but any delay in getting the right treatment can result in complications like infections or even amputation.

LOCALISED INFECTIONS

A localised infection occurs at the wound site. Any open wound increases your risk of infection by giving bacteria that live on the skin an entry point into the body. The longer a wound remains open, the higher the chance an infection will develop.

Signs of a localised infection include:

- Redness, swelling and heat
- Pain
- Pus (a thick, yellowish liquid coming from the wound).

If your wound shows these signs, see a healthcare practitioner as soon as possible. Remember: with the right treatment, chronic wounds can be healed.

SYSTEMIC (WHOLE BODY) INFECTIONS

If left untreated, a localised wound infection can spread throughout the body via the blood vessels, causing a serious systemic infection. In addition to the signs of a localised infection, you may also experience:

- Fever and chills
- Low body temperature
- Rapid breathing and heart rate
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhoea.



THE WOUND WARNING SIGNS

- ✓ Hot and painful
- ✓ Smells bad
- ✓ Oozing thick yellow liquid
- ✓ 30+ days to heal



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Consumer education about chronic wounds by experts at the national peak body, Wounds Australia. Find more factsheets for consumers on our website.



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Sepsis is the body's extreme response to a systemic infection, releasing chemicals that can damage organs like the heart and kidneys. Septic shock is a dramatic drop in blood pressure with potentially life-threatening results.

Please seek immediate medical attention if you are experiencing symptoms of a systemic infection, sepsis or septic shock.

AMPUTATION

Chronic wounds such as pressure sores and diabetes-related ulcers can worsen if they are not treated appropriately. They may deepen and affect your muscles and tendons or even expose the bone. In severe cases, amputation – the surgical removal of all or part of a limb – may be required to save your life. And if you have one amputation, the likelihood of a second amputation increases.

Toes and feet are the most commonly amputated parts of the body, often because pressure sores or diabetes-related ulcers are left untreated or do not respond well to treatment. However, there are many options for treating pressure sores and diabetes-related ulcers. Remember: chronic wounds can heal with the right treatment.



Read more about diabetic foot disease in factsheet 9 and about venous leg ulcers in factsheet 11.



In the factsheet 9, we'll look at steps you can take to help your wound heal and prevent future wounds from occurring.



ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Good sources of advice about wounds include:

- Wound care clinicians
- GPs
- Nurses
- Pharmacists
- Podiatrists
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers
- Diabetes educators
- Some allied health professionals such as dietitians, occupational therapists and physiotherapists.



Find out more about healthcare professionals working with wounds in factsheet 6 on our website.

Care professional? Join Wounds Australia for events, guidelines, discounts and more: woundsaustralia.org