

SKIN TEARS FAQ

What is a skin tear?

A skin tear may occur due to shearing and friction or a blunt trauma, causing the epidermis to separate from the dermis (partial thickness wound) or both the epidermis and the dermis to separate from the underlying structures (full thickness wound).

Skin tears are perceived by some to be minor injuries. However, they can be significant and complex wounds. With complications such as infection or a compromised vascular status skin tears can easily turn life threatening.

Who is at risk of skin tears? Why?

Skin tears are a very common type of wound with the adults aged 65 years and older. In Australia, skin tears account for 54.8% of all wound types in the elderly.

The risk of sustaining a skin tear increases significantly with age and literature indicates that women are more susceptible to skin tears than males, due to specific skin transformations that occur as a result of decreasing hormone levels.

With age the skin's subcutaneous fatty layer becomes thinner on certain areas of the body such as the face, neck and hands. With lacking the cushioning produced by fatty tissue deposits the skin becomes susceptible to skin tears.

What makes a person more at risk ?

- ▶ Age and gender
- ▶ Dry, fragile skin
- ▶ Medications that thin the skin such as steroids
- ▶ Poor nutrition and hydration
- ▶ Impaired mobility or vision
- ▶ Cognitive or sensory impairment
- ▶ Dependence on others for showering, dressing

How to prevent sustaining skin tears?

Ensure that **Skin Protector Sleeves** are worn for both legs and arms.

Your physiotherapist or nurse can recommend a suitable type.

Ensure the skin is well moisturised twice a day.

Use soap free wash. Many soaps remove valuable and natural oils from skin.

If it is an option request nursing staff to alternate shower and sponge days. Sponge cleansing tends leave behind more of the natural skin oils.

Offer fluids between meals to maintain hydration. Dehydration increases susceptibility to skin trauma.

Non-spill and adaptable cups and water bottles are always helpful and encourage intake of fluids.

Provide a well-lit space to aid visibility. Night lights are also helpful at night.

Maintain uncluttered environment to minimise the risk of bumping into equipment or furniture. Reduce clutter and clear space.

Padding equipment such as **Sheep Skin Covers** for wheelchair footplates and armrests are available to cushion everyday bumps and reduce skin traumas.

Many skin tears occur while dressing. Skin can snag or rub while putting arms through sleeves and legs through trouser pants.

We tend to lose flexibility with age. **Adaptable Clothing** will help with dressing.

Stroke sufferers often lose their ability to lift or stretch out their arms while dressing.

This may cause grazing or frictional shearing of skin against clothes causing tears and bruising.