

Self Harm and Self Injury



Some people harm themselves to relieve distress. This can take many forms including cutting, burning and overdosing. Physical pain is often easier to cope with than emotional pain. Self-harm can make people feel relieved and calm for a while. It is not an attempt to die. It is a way of coping with intense feelings.

There are things you can do to minimise harm. Some ideas are:

Avoid drugs and/or alcohol if you think you are likely to self-harm, so you don't accidentally wound yourself more seriously than you intended.

Prevent infection by using something clean when you cut. Never share what you use to self-injure. Try to avoid areas where there are major veins and arteries close to the surface.

Make sure your tetanus jabs are up to date.

Put burns under cold water for 20/30 minutes. Burns and scalds can be more severe than you think - the pain can be far worse later. Cling film, loosely covering the burn, can act as a temporary dressing. You can buy creams and sprays for burns from your chemist.

Be prepared. Have dressings and antiseptics ready so you can care for your injuries. You can learn more about looking after wounds, cuts, burns and so on from a first aid book, someone you trust who knows about first aid or perhaps the nurse in your doctor's practice.

Call an ambulance if blood is spurting from a wound. Wrap the injury in a clean towel or tea towel and try and stay calm. Clean any cuts with gauze swabs, not cotton wool. Cover with a dry, non-adhesive dressing. It can be useful to keep antiseptic creams, sprays etc. handy. Paper stitches can be used to close superficial wounds.

If any of your cuts are **gaping and deep** you will need medical attention. Try to keep the injured part raised and apply pressure until you get to hospital, to reduce the bleeding.

You should also seek medical attention for **burns** larger than a fifty pence piece, or that have penetrated deep into the skin.

If cuts or burns become **infected** it is important to get medical treatment or you may become seriously ill.

Shock can occur if you lose a lot of blood (spurting or running continuously) or if you have severe or large burns. Call an ambulance if this happens.

Poisoning. If you drink bleach or any other corrosive liquid you can be in danger of poisoning. You must get medical advice or attention immediately.

Overdoses. If you think you may have taken too many drugs (prescribed or illegal) get medical help quickly, particularly with drugs such as paracetamol.

Remember you are not alone. Many people self-harm as a way of coping.