

What to Do if You're Home Alone and Get a Severe Cut

Stop Bleeding Immediately

- Apply firm, steady pressure with a clean cloth, sterile gauze, or a bandage directly over the wound
- Raise the injured limb above heart level if possible to slow blood flow
- If bleeding is heavy and does not stop after 5–10 minutes of continuous pressure, call 911 or have someone call for you
- If the cut is on an arm or leg and bleeding is uncontrolled, and you are trained, you may apply a tourniquet above the wound

Protect Yourself and the Wound

- Wash your hands with soap and water before touching the injury
- If the cut is deep, jagged, or contaminated, do not try to clean it yourself if you cannot stop the bleeding — call 911 instead
- If bleeding is controlled, rinse the wound under cool, running water for several minutes to flush out dirt
- Gently clean around (not in) the wound with mild soap; avoid hydrogen peroxide or iodine directly on the wound

Cover the Wound

- Apply a thin layer of antibiotic ointment or petroleum jelly to keep the wound moist
- Cover with a sterile bandage or gauze; change it daily or if wet/dirty

Decide if You Need Medical Care

- Seek urgent medical attention if any of these apply
- Bleeding does not stop after 10 minutes of firm pressure.
- The cut is deep, gaping, over a joint, on the face, or caused by a bite/puncture.
- You feel numbness, weakness, or the wound is very large.
- Signs of infection: increasing redness, swelling, warmth, pus, foul smell, or fever
- You are unsure about your tetanus vaccination or it's been more than 5 years since your last booster and the wound is dirty/deep

If You Cannot Get to a Doctor Immediately

- Keep the wound clean and covered.
- Monitor for infection signs daily.
- If symptoms worsen or bleeding restarts, call 911 or go to the nearest urgent care/ER.

Key tip: A “severe” cut that is deep, heavily bleeding, or contaminated should not be left for home treatment alone — call 911 right away