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Professional Resources for Care, Catering & Hospitality

FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Skin Tears Awareness

A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 055

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Introduction

Skin tears are wounds that occur when fragile skin is damaged by friction, shear or blunt force, causing the skin to separate. They are particularly common in older adults and individuals with delicate or ageing skin, where even minor knocks or handling can result in injury.

Although skin tears may appear minor, they can be painful, increase the risk of infection and take time to heal if not recognised and managed appropriately. Many skin tears can be prevented through good skin care, gentle handling and awareness of individual risk factors.

Care staff play an important role in protecting skin integrity by using safe moving and handling techniques, maintaining skin health, recognising skin tears promptly and reporting concerns so that appropriate treatment can be provided.

Why This Resource Matters

Understanding skin tears awareness helps care staff to:

- Recognise individuals who are at increased risk of skin tears.
 - Understand the common causes of skin tears.
 - Help prevent injuries through safe, person-centred care.
 - Maintain healthy skin by promoting hydration and good skin care.
 - Recognise skin tears early and report them promptly.
 - Follow individual care plans and organisational procedures.
 - Support comfort, dignity and effective wound management.
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Key Message

Skin tears are **not an inevitable part of ageing**. By handling individuals gently, protecting fragile skin, recognising injuries early and reporting concerns promptly, care staff can help reduce the risk of complications, promote healing and support safe, compassionate and person-centred care.

Understanding Skin Tears

Skin tears are acute wounds caused when the skin is damaged by friction, shear or blunt force. They are most common in older adults because ageing skin becomes thinner, less elastic and more fragile over time. Individuals with poor nutrition, dehydration, reduced mobility or long-term medical conditions may also be at greater risk.

Skin tears can occur during everyday activities such as moving and handling, transferring, dressing or from accidental knocks against furniture or equipment. Although they may seem minor, they should always be taken seriously to reduce the risk of pain, infection and delayed healing.

Care staff should always follow the individual's care plan and use safe handling techniques to help protect fragile skin.

Helping to Prevent Skin Tears

Care staff can reduce the risk of skin tears by:

- Handling individuals gently and avoiding unnecessary friction or pulling.
- Using safe moving and handling techniques at all times.
- Keeping the environment free from hazards that may cause accidental knocks or injuries.
- Encouraging good hydration and a balanced diet to support healthy skin.
- Applying prescribed moisturisers or skin care products where identified in the individual's care plan.
- Ensuring clothing and footwear fit properly and do not rub against the skin.
- Observing the skin regularly for signs of dryness, bruising or increased fragility.
- Reporting any concerns or changes in skin condition promptly.

Taking simple preventative measures can significantly reduce the risk of skin tears and help maintain healthy skin.

Remember

Fragile skin requires gentle, person-centred care. By protecting vulnerable skin, using safe moving and handling techniques, recognising injuries early and reporting concerns promptly, care staff help reduce pain, prevent complications and promote effective healing while maintaining the individual's dignity and wellbeing.

Professional Responsibilities

Every care worker has a responsibility to help protect fragile skin and reduce the risk of skin tears. Gentle handling, good observation and following safe working practices are essential to maintaining skin integrity and supporting an individual's comfort and wellbeing. Care staff should always work within the limits of their training, competence and organisational policies.

As a care professional, you should always:

- Treat every individual with dignity, respect and compassion.
- Follow the individual's care plan and any skin care or moving and handling plans.
- Use safe moving and handling techniques to minimise friction and shear.
- Handle fragile skin gently and avoid unnecessary pulling or dragging.
- Encourage adequate hydration and good nutrition where appropriate to support healthy skin.
- Observe the skin regularly for signs of dryness, bruising, tears or other changes.
- Record any skin tears or concerns accurately and report them promptly.
- Work within the limits of your role and seek advice whenever you are unsure.

Providing safe, preventative care helps reduce the likelihood of skin tears and supports faster healing if an injury does occur.

When to Raise Concerns

You should report concerns immediately if:

- A skin tear occurs, regardless of its size.
- There is persistent bleeding or difficulty controlling bleeding.
- The wound shows signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, warmth, pain or discharge.
- You notice increasing bruising or repeated unexplained skin tears.
- The surrounding skin becomes fragile, damaged or slow to heal.
- The individual experiences significant pain or discomfort.
- You notice any sudden deterioration in skin condition or general health.

Prompt reporting helps ensure appropriate wound assessment, treatment and ongoing monitoring.

Good Practice Reminder

Skin tears are often preventable through careful observation, gentle handling and good skin care. By protecting fragile skin, recognising injuries early, maintaining accurate records and reporting concerns promptly, care staff play an important role in reducing complications, supporting healing and delivering safe, dignified and person-centred care.

Summary

Skin tears are common injuries in older adults and individuals with fragile skin, but many can be prevented through good skin care, gentle handling and safe working practices. Early recognition and appropriate reporting help reduce the risk of infection, promote healing and improve an individual's comfort and wellbeing.

Care staff play a vital role in protecting skin integrity by following care plans, using safe moving and handling techniques, maintaining healthy skin and reporting any concerns promptly. Small preventative actions can make a significant difference in reducing injuries and supporting person-centred care.

Skin Tears Awareness Checklist

- ✓ Handle individuals gently to minimise friction and shear.
 - ✓ Follow safe moving and handling techniques at all times.
 - ✓ Encourage good hydration and balanced nutrition to support healthy skin.
 - ✓ Observe the skin regularly for dryness, bruising or signs of damage.
 - ✓ Follow individual skin care and moving and handling plans.
 - ✓ Record all skin tears and skin changes accurately.
 - ✓ Report any skin tears or concerns promptly.
 - ✓ Treat every individual with dignity, compassion and respect.
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Further Information

For further guidance on skin tears, visit:

NHS – Wounds and Skin Care

<https://www.nhs.uk>

NICE – Pressure Ulcers: Prevention and Management

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg179>

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

<https://www.cqc.org.uk>

NHS England – Excellence in Wound Care Resources

<https://www.england.nhs.uk>

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Related Knowledge Hub Resources

- Resource 020 – Pressure Ulcer Prevention Awareness – A Professional Awareness Guide for Care Staff
- Resource 023 – Hand Hygiene Best Practice Checklist – A Professional Awareness Guide for Care Staff
- Resource 024 – Safe Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in Care Settings – A Professional Awareness Guide for Care Staff
- Resource 030 – Infection Prevention & Control – A Quick Reference Guide for Care Staff
- Resource 049 – Frailty Awareness – A Practical Guide for Care Staff
- Resource 054 – Constipation Awareness – A Practical Guide for Care Staff

Related FlexiLearnHub Courses

- Infection Prevention & Control Awareness
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