**Human Bites Treatment**

Treatment of a human bite can be anything from just ice for swelling to a trip to the operating room, depending on the bite. For serious bites, early treatment is important to give the best chance at preventing infection.

**Self-Care at Home**

First aid for a bite usually just involves cleaning the area and applying ice for pain relief. Bites generally do not bleed a large amount, but, if they do, put direct pressure on the area for 10 minutes, which should stop the bleeding. Elevation of the injured area above the level of the heart may also help stop bleeding and prevent swelling of the wound.

- **Save all tissue parts:** Make sure you bring any tissue that is bitten off to the hospital's emergency department. If the doctor cannot reattach it, the hospital will dispose of it. If you need to travel a long way to get help, place the part in a plastic bag in ice water (not directly on ice).
- **Keep cleaning simple:** Run large amounts of cool clean water over a wound. A mild soap is fine, but do not pour alcohol or peroxide on an open wound because this can injure the tissue. A good rule of cleaning is that anything put on a wound that causes burning or increased pain probably does more harm than good.
- **Do not use butter or home remedies.** It is best to leave the wound uncovered until checked by the doctor.
- **Apply ice for pain relief:** Wrap some ice in a towel and apply it to the area. This will ease the pain and help keep the swelling down. Do not apply ice directly on the skin because it may freeze the skin.

**Medical Treatment**

Minor bites: A bite that just causes bruising or only scrapes the top layer of skin will not require much more than cleaning with soap and water, ice, and mild pain medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol is one brand name). A tetanus shot may be needed if the skin is broken and it has been more than 5 to 10 years since the last shot. Antibiotics are usually not necessary for this type of bite.

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Deeper bites or bites causing cuts: Besides giving a tetanus shot, the doctor will generally numb these bites with medicine (such as lidocaine) and then thoroughly clean and examine the wound. Cleaning of the wound, unless it is a puncture or very small, will usually involve squirting a large amount of clean water into the wound. With an open wound, sometimes large amounts of water directly from the tap are used to flush it out. Occasionally, a small amount of an antiseptic solution is added to the water before rinsing the wound. The skin around the wound is sometimes cleansed with such solutions, also. In the cleaning process, the doctor may cut out small pieces of tissue that appear to be dead. This is to decrease the risk of infection.

Stitches (sutures): The decision to use or not use stitches in a human bite depends on many factors. Doctors tend to use stitches less often in cuts caused by human bites because of the high risk of infection. On the other hand, certain bites, especially those of the face, may turn out better if stitches are used, and the risk of infection in this area is not that high.

- A very deep cut in the tongue, for example, will usually be stitched even though it is a human bite because doctors know that it will usually not get infected even if stitched.
- Most small cuts heal on their own even if stitches are not used. Sometimes the doctor will have you return in 4-5 days to see if stitches can then be put in to close a large cut caused by a bite. This is called delayed closure, and it works quite well leaving no larger a scar.

Other treatment: The doctor may apply a splint to the bite area to keep it from moving. A sling may be used to help keep an injured hand elevated. Pain medication may be prescribed, although the doctor will be careful not to cover up pain that would indicate an infection.
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