

What Is Wound Debridement and When Is It Necessary?

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Debridement definition

green dot by. The process is also called larval therapy, maggot debridement therapy, and biosurgery.

The maggots help wound healing by eating old tissue. They also control infection by releasing antibacterial substances and eating harmful bacteria.

The maggots are placed on the wound or in a mesh bag, which is kept in place with dressing. They're left for 24 to 72 hours and replaced twice a week.

Biological debridement is best for wounds that are large or infected by antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria, like [MRSA](#). It's also used if you can't have surgery due to medical conditions.

Enzymatic debridement

Enzymatic debridement, or chemical debridement, uses an ointment or gel with enzymes that soften unhealthy tissue. The enzymes may come from an animal, plant, or bacteria.

The medication is applied once or twice a day. The wound is covered with a dressing, which is changed regularly. The dressing will take away dead tissue when it's removed.

Enzymatic debridement is ideal if you have bleeding problems or a high risk for surgery complications.

It's not recommended for large and severely infected wounds.

Autolytic debridement

Autolytic debridement uses your body's enzymes and natural fluids to soften bad tissue. This is done with a moisture-retaining dressing that's typically changed once a day.

When moisture accumulates, old tissue swells up and separates from the wound.

Autolytic debridement is best for noninfected wounds and [pressure sores](#).

If you have an infected wound that's being treated, you can get autolytic debridement with another form of debridement.

Mechanical debridement

Mechanical debridement is the most common type of wound debridement. It removes unhealthy tissue with a moving force.

Types of mechanical debridement include:

- **Hydrotherapy.** This method uses running water to wash away old tissue. It might involve a whirlpool bath, shower treatment, or syringe and catheter tube.
- **Wet-to-dry dressing.** Wet gauze is applied to the wound. After it dries and sticks to the wound, it's physically removed, which takes away dead tissue.
- **Monofilament debridement pads.** A soft polyester pad is gently brushed across the wound. This removes bad tissue and wound debris.

Mechanical debridement is appropriate for noninfected and infected wounds.

Conservative sharp and surgical sharp debridement

Sharp debridement removes unhealthy tissue by cutting it off.

Conservative sharp debridement uses scalpels, curettes, or scissors. The cut doesn't extend to surrounding healthy tissue. As a minor bedside surgery, it can be performed by a family physician, nurse, dermatologist, or podiatrist.

Surgical sharp debridement uses surgical instruments. The cut might include healthy tissue around the wound. It's done by a surgeon and requires [anesthesia](#).

Usually, sharp debridement isn't the first choice. It's often done if another method of debridement doesn't work or if you need urgent treatment.

Surgical sharp debridement is also used for large, deep, or very painful wounds.

Debridement dentistry

A dental debridement is a procedure that removes [tartar](#) and [plaque](#) buildup from your teeth. It's also known as a full mouth debridement.

The procedure is useful if you haven't had a [dental cleaning](#) for several years.

Unlike wound debridement, dental debridement doesn't remove any tissue.

What to expect from the procedure

Before getting a wound debridement, preparation depends on your:

- wound
- health conditions
- type of debridement

Preparation may include:

- physical exam
- measurement of wound
- pain medication (mechanical debridement)
- local or [general anesthesia](#) (sharp debridement)

If you're getting general anesthesia, you'll need to arrange a ride home. You'll also have to fast for a certain amount of time before your procedure.

Non-surgical debridement is done in a doctor's office or patient's room. A medical professional will apply the treatment, which is repeated for two to six weeks or longer.

Sharp debridement is quick. During the procedure, the surgeon uses metal instruments to examine the wound. The surgeon cuts out old tissue and washes the wound. If you're getting a [skin graft](#), the surgeon will put it in place.

Often, debridement is repeated until the wound heals. Depending on your wound, your next procedure might be a different method.

Is debridement painful?

Biological, enzymatic, and autolytic debridement usually cause little pain, if any.

Mechanical and sharp debridement can be painful.

If you're getting mechanical debridement, you may receive pain medication.

If you're getting sharp debridement, you'll get local or general anesthesia. [Local anesthesia](#) will numb the wound. General anesthesia will make you fall asleep, so you won't feel anything.

Sometimes it can hurt when the dressing is changed. Ask your doctor about pain medication, and other ways to manage pain.

Debridement wound care

It's important to take care of your wound. This will help it heal and minimize the risk for complications.

Here's what you can do to protect your wound during the healing process:

- **Regularly change the dressing.** Change it daily or according to your doctor's instructions.
- **Keep the dressing dry.** Avoid swimming pools, baths, and hot tubs. Ask your doctor when you can shower.
- **Keep the wound clean.** Always wash your hands before and after you touch your wound.
- **Don't apply pressure.** Use special cushions to avoid placing weight on your wound. If your wound is on your leg or foot, you might need crutches.

Your doctor will provide specific instructions on how to take care of your wound.

Recovery from debridement surgery

Generally, recovery takes 6 to 12 weeks.

Complete recovery depends on the severity, size, and location of the wound. It also depends on the debridement method.

Your doctor will determine when you can go back to work. If your job is physically demanding or involves the affected area, be sure to tell your doctor.

Proper wound care is essential for a smooth recovery. You should also:

- **Eat healthy.** Your body needs enough [nutrients to heal](#).
- **Avoid smoking.** Smoking makes it difficult for nutrients and oxygens to reach your wound. This slows down healing. Smoking can be difficult, but a doctor can help you create a [quit smoking plan](#) right for you.
- **Go to follow-up appointments.** Your doctor needs to check your wound and make sure it's healing properly.

Complications of debridement

Like all medical procedures, debridement poses a risk for complications.

These include:

- [irritation](#)
- [bleeding](#)
- [damage to healthy tissue](#)
- [allergic reaction](#)
- [pain](#)
- [bacterial infection](#)

Despite these possible side effects, the benefits often outweigh the risks. Many wounds can't heal without debridement.

When to see a doctor

Pay attention to your wound. If you suspect an infection, contact your doctor.

Signs of infection include:

- [increasing pain](#)
- [redness](#)
- [swelling](#)
- [excessive bleeding](#)
- [new discharge](#)
- [bad odor](#)
- [fever](#)
- [chills](#)
- [nausea](#)
- [vomiting](#)

If you received general anesthesia, seek medical help if you have:

- [coughing](#)
- [difficulty breathing](#)
- [chest pain](#)
- [severe nausea](#)
- [vomiting](#)

The takeaway

If your wound isn't getting better, you might need debridement. The procedure helps wounds heal by removing dead or infected tissue.

Debridement can be done with live maggots, special dressings, or ointments that soften tissue. The old tissue can also be cut off or removed with a mechanical force like running water.

The best type of debridement depends on your wound. Often multiple methods are used together.

Recovery takes 6 to 12 weeks. Practicing good wound care will help your wound heal properly. Call your doctor if you have increasing pain, swelling, or other new symptoms during recovery.

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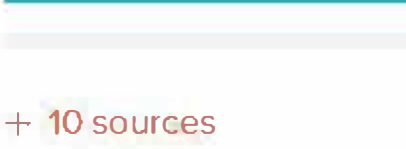
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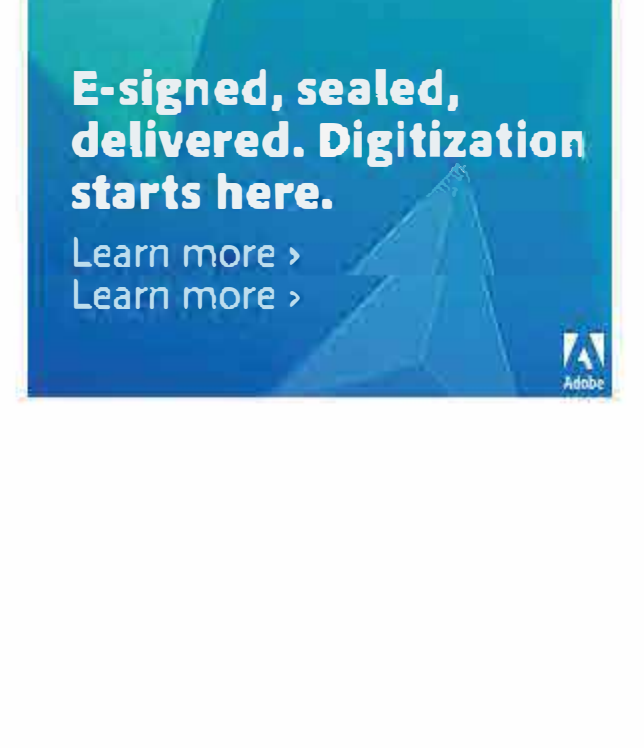
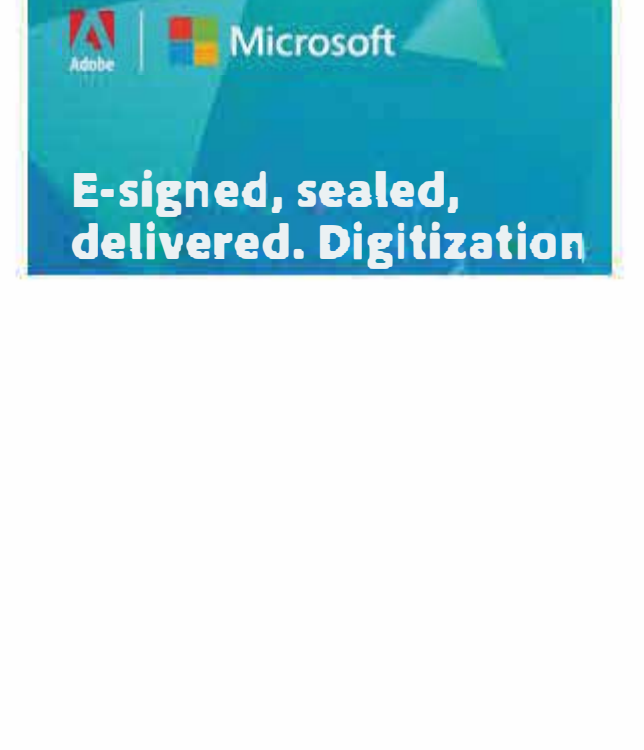
Gangrene

Medically reviewed by William Morrison, MD

Gangrene is when part of your body tissue dies. Though it usually affects your extremities, like your toes and fingers, it can

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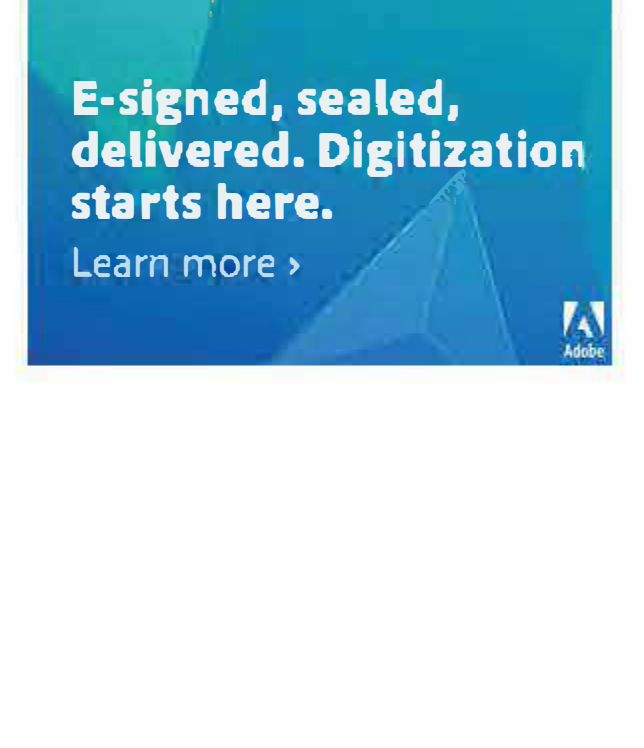
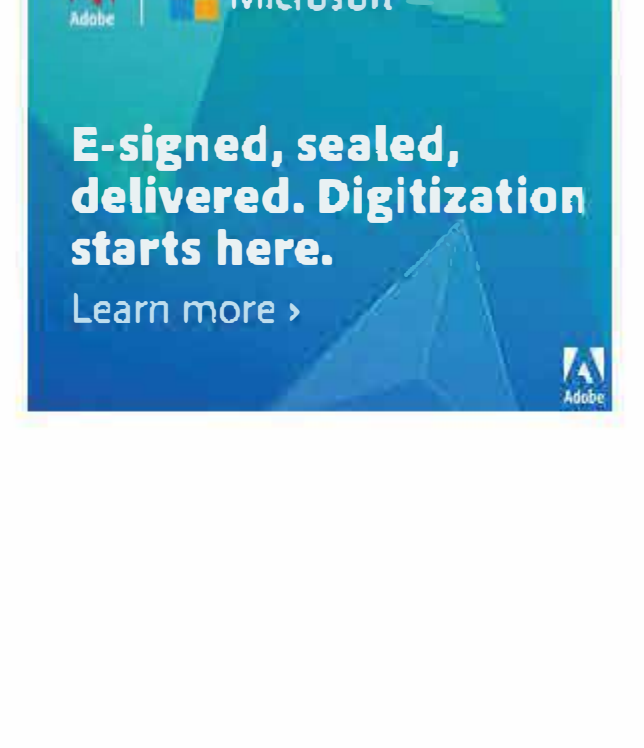
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