

## Misunderstood Concept:

Dressings for wounds need to be changed daily.

## The Truth:

Dressings very rarely need to be changed daily. They should be changed when there is too much exudate, when there are signs of infection and the wound needs to be observed, or when the dressing selected has reached the time limit for application. Generally, dressings need to be changed every 2-7 days.

## The analogy:

The analogy I've come up with revolves around a boiling pot of water. When you're boiling water, it will boil faster with the lid on. Every time you open the lid, the temperature decreases, and some of the steam escapes. So it's best to leave the lid on until you know the water is boiling. This is the same with wounds – you should leave the dressing on until there are signs that it needs to be changed. Just as the water boils more slowly with the lid off, so too does the wound heal more slowly every time you change the dressing. Every time you change the dressing, it decreases the temperature of the wound, which slows down healing.

Even though we can't always see the water boiling in the pot, we know it's happening, and this is the same with the wound. We know the body is capable of amazing things and we need to leave it alone to do its thing to heal the wound.

Often nurses (and patients) are concerned that leaving the dressing on will encourage infection. The opposite is actually true – every time you open up the dressing, you increase the risk of infection. And same as the boiling pot of water – even with the lid on, you can see when the water starts to boil over and you need to attend to it, it's the same with wounds. You would see signs around the dressing when it needs to be changed, including signs of excess drainage and signs of infection. You don't need to remove the dressing every day to know if there are signs of infection.



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*Infected laceration of the shin.* Photograph. *Britannica ImageQuest*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2 Mar 2017.  
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