Your Care

Thoughtful care from our family to yours.

Protecting Fragile Skin

Helping an older relative at home

Everyday steps to prevent skin tears, what to do if one happens and a printable daily checklist.



Preventing skin tears at home

As skin ages it can become thinner, drier and easier to damage. A knock against a chair, a catch on a door latch or friction while getting dressed can break the skin. Tears can be painful, take weeks to heal and sometimes become infected. Repeated injuries can make someone less confident moving around.

Wash gently and moisturise regularly

Use lukewarm water and a gentle soap substitute if ordinary soap dries the skin. Pat dry with a soft towel. Smooth a fragrance-free moisturiser onto intact skin, especially the arms and legs. A morning and evening routine can help. Follow any advice from the nurse, GP or pharmacist.

Emollient safety. Cream residue on clothing, bedding or dressings can make fabrics catch fire more easily. Keep them away from cigarettes and naked flames. Wipe up spills to reduce slips.

Reduce knocks, catches and friction

Check routes to the bathroom, kitchen and favourite chair. Clear clutter, improve lighting and look for places where a walking frame or trolley passes close to handles, latches or sharp corners. Move furniture or fit a suitable guard to sharp furniture corners where helpful.

Try loose long sleeves, trousers or soft arm protectors. Keep nails short and smooth, and take off rings or watches that could catch when helping. Avoid pulling on arms or dragging skin. Follow the moving and handling plan and ask for a demonstration if you’re unsure.

If a wheelchair arm or bed rail keeps catching the skin, ask the equipment provider or occupational therapist to check it before adding padding or making changes.

Make meals and drinks count

Include protein foods such as eggs, fish, yoghurt or beans, vitamin C from fruit and vegetables, and zinc from foods such as meat, dairy or lentils. Oily fish or ground seeds can add healthy fats. Offer drinks regularly and follow any fluid or swallowing plan. Ask a GP, pharmacist or dietitian before starting supplements.

If a skin tear happens

Look for a new break in the skin, bleeding, clear fluid or a loose flap. Check gently when helping with washing or dressing, especially on the arms, hands and shins.

First aid

1. Stop the bleeding. Wash your hands if you can do so promptly. Hold firm, steady pressure with a clean pad or cloth. If blood comes through, add another pad on top and keep pressing.

2. Rinse gently. Once bleeding has stopped, rinse a small tear with clean tap water or sterile saline. Avoid scrubbing, pulling or trimming loose skin.

3. Cover the tear. Use a sterile non-stick dressing. If needed, hold it in place with a light bandage. Keep ordinary plasters and strong adhesive tape off fragile skin. A nurse can assess the skin flap and choose a suitable dressing.

4. Get advice promptly. Contact the GP practice or community nursing team, especially for a shin tear, a loose flap, or if the person has diabetes or poor circulation. Mention blood-thinning medicines. If you need urgent advice or cannot reach the team, contact NHS 111.

Call 999 or go to A&E if the bleeding won't stop, blood is spurting, or the wound is very large or deep.

What to look for afterwards

Check the skin around the dressing each day. Follow the nurse's instructions on when to change it. If the dressing becomes wet, loose or soaked through, ask the team for advice.

Get urgent GP or NHS 111 advice if the area becomes warmer, more swollen or more painful, redness spreads, there is pus or a new smell, or the person develops a fever or feels unwell. On darker skin, changes in warmth, swelling or colour around the wound may be easier to notice than redness.

If tears keep happening, note where and when. A nurse or occupational therapist can help identify what's catching the skin and what might make the routine safer.

Daily skin safety checklist

Print this page and keep it somewhere everyone who helps can see it.

Name _____ Date _____

Morning

- [ ] Check for new bruises or tears when washing or dressing.
- [ ] Apply moisturiser to intact skin and choose protective clothing if useful.

Mealtimes

- [ ] Include a protein-rich food and fruit or vegetables.
- [ ] Offer drinks regularly, following any individual plan.

During the day

- [ ] Keep walkways clear and check for anything that catches the skin.
- [ ] Help gently, following the moving and handling plan. Keep nails smooth.

Evening

- [ ] Check the skin again and apply moisturiser as planned.
- [ ] Look around any dressing and follow the nurse's dressing plan.

Anything to pass on? _____

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Guidance checked 12 November 2026

NHS cuts and grazes · NHS emollients · Kent Community Health NHS skin tear advice
NHS skin tear prevention · NHS nutrition for wound healing · MHRA bed rail safety
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS skin tears