



MEDSTOCK™

A GUIDE TO PRACTICAL SKIN TEAR MANAGEMENT

Protecting fragile skin in community
and aged care settings

PROTECTING FRAGILE SKIN IN COMMUNITY AND AGED CARE SETTINGS

Skin tears are a common wound presentation in community and aged care settings, particularly where skin is fragile, mobility is reduced, or patients require assistance with transfers and daily care.

Prevalence estimates range from 1.1% to 41.2%, particularly in long-term care settings. While they may appear minor at first, skin tears can be painful, complex to manage, and slow to heal if vulnerable tissue is not protected appropriately.

Skin tears require careful assessment, gentle cleansing, preservation of viable tissue (where possible), and dressing selection that helps to

protect the wound bed and surrounding skin. The right dressing should support fragile skin, manage exudate and help minimise further trauma during dressing changes.

For pharmacies, distributors and healthcare providers, this guide offers practical advice on preventing and managing skin tears. It also shows how Medstock's silicone wound care range treats skin tears, with products that provide gentle adhesion, promotes atraumatic removal and support for vulnerable tissue.

WHAT ARE SKIN TEARS?

According to the International Skin Tear Advisory Panel (ISTAP)'s **updated 2025 guidance**,



A **skin tear** is a traumatic wound caused by mechanical forces, including removal of adhesives and patient handling, the depth of which may vary (not extending through the subcutaneous layer).

Severity is influenced not only by wound depth, but also by factors such as tissue damage, bleeding, inflammation and the patient's overall healing capacity.

Uncomplicated skin tears usually heal within approximately four weeks, while complicated skin tears may take longer, particularly in patients with lower limb wounds or comorbidities that affect healing.



WHY SKIN TEARS MATTER

Skin tears are especially relevant in older adults and others with compromised skin integrity.

ISTAP describes them as **painful, often preventable wounds that can significantly affect quality of life**, particularly among older adults and people with compromised skin integrity.

From a service perspective, skin tears can also create ongoing management demands. They require timely assessment, appropriate dressing selection and monitoring, particularly where wound characteristics or surrounding skin condition change.

For pharmacy and distribution partners, this creates a clear need for dressing options that are easy to identify, clinically appropriate for fragile skin, and relevant across a range of wound presentations.

COMMON CAUSES OF SKIN TEARS IN COMMUNITY AND AGED CARE SETTINGS

Skin tears often arise where fragile skin is exposed to friction, shear or blunt trauma.

Common contributing factors include:

- + advanced age
- + reduced mobility
- + dependency in activities of daily living
- + previous skin tears
- + falls risk
- + chronic disease
- + polypharmacy
- + impaired cognition or nutrition
- + impaired skin condition

Across community and aged care settings, common scenarios include:

- + friction and shear during transfers or repositioning
- + knocks against furniture, bedrails, mobility aids or doorframes
- + falls or near-falls
- + dressing or adhesive removal on vulnerable skin
- + repeated trauma to high-risk anatomical areas
- + compromised surrounding skin condition

Dressings may cause further trauma. Medical adhesive-related skin injury is well recognised in clinical care, with a **recent systematic review** reporting a pooled prevalence of 16% in adult inpatients, reinforcing the importance of selecting products that balance secure wear with protection of fragile skin.



PRACTICAL PREVENTION PRINCIPLES

Prevention starts with identifying individuals at higher risk and reducing avoidable trauma wherever possible. This requires a structured approach that includes risk identification, protection of vulnerable skin, minimising friction and shear, and using standardised care pathways where appropriate. **ISTAP advises** that when one or more risk factors are present, a skin tear risk reduction program should be implemented, with reassessment when status changes.

Practical prevention principles include:



+ identifying patients with fragile skin, previous skin tears, falls history or reduced mobility



+ reviewing transfer, repositioning and handling techniques to reduce friction and shear



+ taking extra care with tapes, dressings and adhesive removal



+ protecting high-risk areas exposed to repeated trauma or pressure



+ selecting dressings that provide secure wear without increasing removal trauma



+ supporting skin integrity through careful skin care and observation

For pharmacies, this is where product knowledge becomes highly practical. For distributors and medical purchasers, it is where access to an appropriate fragile-skin dressing range can support more confident supply recommendations across aged care, community and clinic settings.

PRACTICAL MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

ISTAP's treatment goals require:

- + treating the cause
- + implementing prevention protocols
- + maintaining moist wound healing
- + avoiding trauma
- + protecting periwound skin
- + managing exudate
- + avoiding infection
- + supporting pain control

This is done using ISTAP's **skin tear decision algorithm**.



1

CONTROL BLEEDING

The first priority is to control bleeding so the wound can be cleaned, assessed and managed properly. Gentle pressure should be applied, and the limb elevated if appropriate. Dry gauze and other adherent products should be avoided at this stage, as they may stick to the wound bed and cause further trauma on removal.

2

ASSESS, CLASSIFY, MEASURE AND DOCUMENT

Once bleeding is controlled, the wound should be assessed carefully. This includes reviewing the condition of the skin flap, wound size, depth, location, surrounding skin and level of exudate. Skin tears should then be classified using the ISTAP classification system, measured accurately, and documented clearly to support treatment decisions and continuity of care.

3

CLEANSE GENTLY

Skin tears should be cleansed using a gentle technique that does not add further trauma to already fragile tissue. Do not scrub the wound, as this can worsen tissue damage and disrupt the wound bed. A gentle approach helps prepare the area for treatment while protecting viable tissue.

4

RE-APPROXIMATE VIABLE TISSUE WHERE APPROPRIATE

If the skin flap is viable, it should be gently repositioned to cover the wound bed as closely as possible. This can help preserve tissue, support healing and reduce further exposure of vulnerable structures.

5

SELECT AN APPROPRIATE DRESSING

ISTAP describes the ideal dressing for a skin tear as one that is easy to apply and remove, minimises trauma during dressing changes, helps maintain moisture balance, protects the peri-wound skin, and provides a protective barrier against shear and friction.

6

MONITOR FOR INFECTION, PAIN AND CHANGES IN MOISTURE BALANCE

Ongoing monitoring is important throughout treatment. The wound should be observed for signs of infection, increasing pain, and changes in moisture balance, including maceration or drying of the wound bed and surrounding skin.

Routine preventative topical or systemic antimicrobials are not indicated in the absence of clinical infection, reinforcing the need for careful observation rather than automatic antimicrobial use.

7

REASSESS AS THE WOUND CHANGES

Skin tears should be reassessed regularly as healing progresses. Changes in exudate, tissue viability, peri-wound skin condition or dressing tolerance may require a different management approach over time. Regular reassessment supports progressive dressing selection and helps reduce the risk of avoidable complications.

WHY SILICONE DRESSINGS ARE RELEVANT IN SKIN TEAR MANAGEMENT

As noted above, skin tear dressings must do far more than simply cover the wound. They should help protect fragile tissue, reduce trauma at dressing change, support moisture balance and manage exudate.

The combination of gentle adhesion, protection of newly formed tissue and reduced removal trauma makes silicone wound care highly relevant where skin tears or fragile skin are a concern.

Medstock's silicone dressing range

SILICONE FOAM LITE DRESSING WITH BORDER

Wound characteristics: Low-exudate skin tears

Choose a gentle silicone option that protects fragile tissue without unnecessary bulk.



Multipack Available

SILICONE FOAM DRESSING WITH BORDER

Wound characteristics: Moderate to high-exudate skin tears

Choose a more absorbent silicone foam dressing that manages fluid effectively while supporting gentle removal.



Multipack Available

SILICONE WOUND CONTACT LAYER

Wound characteristics: Fragile skin needing a protective contact layer

Choose a silicone interface that helps protect wound tissue and surrounding skin, used with an appropriate secondary dressing where required.



PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR PHARMACY AND HEALTHCARE SUPPLY

Skin tear presentations are common across pharmacy, aged care, community nursing and general practice, creating demand for dressing options that are easy to recommend, easy to range and relevant across different care settings.

In pharmacy, older patients, carers and community customers need products that are gentle on fragile skin, suitable for different exudate levels and straightforward to identify at the point of purchase.

For distributors and medical purchasers, the requirement is broader, spanning everyday wound care needs through to more complex presentations involving fragile skin, exudate management and difficult anatomical areas.

Medstock's silicone wound care range is well placed to meet that demand, with options that cover low to high-exudate wounds, shaped dressings for sacral and heel areas, and product features aligned with practical skin tear care, including gentle adhesion and atraumatic removal.

Supported by the principles outlined in peer-reviewed literature and ISTAP guidance, the range offers a more relevant solution for customers managing skin tears across community, aged care and clinical environments.

+ Contact the Medstock team to discuss the right fit for your customer base, care setting or product mix.



Disclaimer

This information is intended for healthcare professionals.

References

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