

BASIC BANDAGE CARE

Basic bandage care at home is very important. Bandages **can be as hurtful as they can be helpful** if they slip, become wet or dirty, draw the patients attention to the site, are too tight, neglected etc. Bandages **must be assessed several times daily** to be sure they are **intact, dry and clean**. A dirty and/or moist bandage against warm skin provides the perfect environment for bacteria to grow. Very severe skin infections and incisional infections (if an incision is present under the bandage) can occur in this situation, often requiring prolonged antibiotic therapy and potentially surgical debridement.

Bandages that slip can fail to support the area they were intended to support and can cause restriction or damage to a new area. Good examples would be: a bandage around the abdomen that moves forward and restricts normal breathing or a bandage over a knee incision that slides down and leaves the incision unprotected and the knee unsupported. Marking the areas where the bandage was placed so that you can check daily for movement may be a good idea.

If a bandage is **applied too tightly or slips and restricts a site**, adequate circulation can be interrupted, creating discomfort and damage/death to the tissues. Sliding a finger under the bandage routinely is a rough way to assess how tight the bandage is. **Swelling above or below** the bandage is a good indicator that it is too tight (for example, swollen toes on a bandaged limb). Signs of discomfort or chewing at the site can also indicate a bandage that is too tight.

The bandage itself may draw the patient's attention to the site and lead to **licking or biting** at the bandage and uncommonly the skin below. An E-collar should be left on at all times if a patient shows too much interest in their bandage or if they are to be left alone and unmonitored all day. They can make the injury beneath worse or moisten the bandage, leading to infection as above.

If there is any doubt about the cleanliness, dryness, position etc. of a bandage, a **veterinarian should assess it** as soon as possible. Please do not try to fix or replace a bandage at home as there is a certain art to bandaging. The importance of monitoring a bandage cannot be stressed enough.