

# Time and cleanliness key to wound management

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A common call for me is one to see an animal with a wound. The two most important things associated with wound care are time and cleanliness.

Firstly, the time between the incident itself and investigating the wound, and, secondly, the length of time it will take to heal. Once an injury is noticed, it should be investigated as soon as possible. Ask yourself how deep is it, where is it and what are the potential outcomes of it.

Therefore, you can assess whether it needs veterinary attention or whether it can be comfortably handled at home.

If stitches are required, then the sooner the better; otherwise, the broken tissue may die and your vet may not be able to stitch it at all. Bear in mind, a wound left to heal by second intention takes considerably longer.

When we ourselves get a cut, the first thing we tend to do is clean it out. Understandably, this isn't always easy, nor practical, to do immediately for livestock, but should be done as soon as possible, so that you know what you're dealing with from the outset.

Relying on antibiotics should never be a substitute for spending time and effort on maintaining the cleanliness

of a wound. This applies to all cuts, but especially to the legs and hooves. Here, facilities and restraint play a more critical role, especially with regards to a wound that needs to be attended to every few days.

Successful resolution to lacerations on the lower limbs is heavily reliant on regular cleaning, bandaging or poulticing. Failure to do so can rapidly result in an irredeemable situation.

Applying a poultice is a simple and economical treatment that can be done on farm to help draw out infection. Poultices pre-date the use of antibiotics and the basic ingredients can be found in most

cupboards at home—chlorhexidine or iodine, sugar, Epsom salts. Many people still use bread, but, personally, I prefer a multi-layered dressing material designed specifically for poultices. There are also many ready-made poultices commercially available.

Wounds that are left to fester only make life more difficult for farmer, vet and beast. To avoid a painful and protracted ordeal, you must take action before pus, rotten tissue or maggots set in. Otherwise, you may have to resort to more aggressive therapies like amputation or even euthanasia.

If infection sets in, it can very quickly enter the blood, caus-

ing a septicaemia or settle in a joint, both of which have a bad prognosis and want to be avoided at all costs.

If you have any doubts, questions or concerns about an affected animal, please contact your local vet.

Blinne Loughran works at Old Church Veterinary Hospital, The Mall, Ballyshannon, Co Donegal. Old Church Veterinary Hospital is part of XLVets. XLVets is a group of progressive practices who are working together to achieve a better future for agriculture and veterinary in Ireland. For more information, see [www.xlvets.ie](http://www.xlvets.ie).