

**BITESIZED
TEACHING**



Self-harm/Wound management

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Self harm describes a wide range of behaviours where someone hurts themselves deliberately. This can be in response to emotional or anxiety that the person can't deal with safely, and can be intended to relieve psychological distress or as an attempt to take their own life.

There are many forms of self harm, but on acute mental health wards, more commonly seen are cutting, tying ligatures, insertion of foreign objects into the body or under the skin, burning, or striking a part of the body against a hard surface.

It is fundamental to understand the reasons for this type of behaviour and help the person more safely manage their distress, whilst at the same time keeping them physically safe, including treating any wounds of possible infection.



Signs and Symptoms

- Patient discloses that they have self-harmed
- Nursing staff notice that the patient is injured
- Nursing staff observe patient self-harming on the ward



Causes

- Deterioration in mental state, causing an increase in self-harming behaviours
- Social stressors impacting on the patients wellbeing
- Patient tends to self-harm to alleviate significant distress/anxiety



Ward Based Management

- Make the environment safer by encouraging patients to hand in for safekeeping any items that could be dangerous
- Take physical observations (blood pressure, pulse, temperature, saturation levels and respiratory rate). Closely monitor the patient if they are feeling dizzy/nauseous and/or experiencing a higher than normal temperature
- If the cuts are superficial but are bleeding, then they need to be cleaned and steri-stripped appropriately
- When dressing wounds, be mindful of any soreness, swelling or infection
- If an object has been inserted into a wound, then nursing staff must assess the severity and then inform the doctor as they may need to go to general hospital for further treatment
- Depending on individual risk and mental state, the nursing/medical team must conduct a thorough risk assessment and review observation levels, whether potential self-harm objects need to be removed from their room and whether they require further treatment
- Consider referring the patient to specialists in tissue viability if wound infection becomes a problem.