

# Larvae therapy: Using maggots to help your wound to heal

Information and advice for patients

## *Vascular*

### **What is larvae therapy?**

Larvae therapy involves applying maggots to a wound to help it heal. Maggots can be used to treat dirty or infected wounds as they remove dead tissue and bacteria (germs), leaving behind healthy tissue that can heal.

The maggots used in this treatment are specially bred and are sterile so they cannot cause infection. They are also far too young to lay eggs in your wound and will not be on your wound long enough to turn into flies.

### **What are the benefits of this treatment?**

The benefits of using maggots on your wound are:

- The maggots quickly remove dead tissue leaving healthy tissue behind to heal.
- It reduces wound infection.
- It reduces the smell from the wound.

The benefit of using maggots to heal wounds was first seen on the battlefields where maggots found their way into wounds and people noticed that some of the wounds they got into healed more quickly and with fewer complications.

### **What are the risks of this treatment?**

The risks of having this treatment are:

- Some people will experience increased pain if they have ischaemia (reduced blood supply) to the wound. If this occurs the treatment can be stopped and/or your painkillers can be reviewed.
- Occasionally the surrounding skin can become irritated. To prevent this, a barrier cream or dressing will be used on the surrounding skin.
- Very rarely maggots have caused wounds to bleed. Your wound will be inspected daily, and the maggots will be removed if there is any bleeding.
- Your body temperature may increase during the treatment but this is very rare and nothing to be concerned about.

### **What are the risks of not having this treatment?**

If you choose not to have this treatment you will not experience the benefits it gives. It is your choice whether or not to have the treatment.

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### **Are there any alternatives to this treatment?**

The alternative to this treatment is to have conventional dressings applied to your wound to help clean and heal it. For some people an alternative may be to have the dead tissue removed from the wound surgically but this is not always suitable.

### **Preparing for the treatment**

Before the treatment is started you will have the chance to ask any questions you have about it and will be asked to sign a consent form agreeing to the treatment.

### **How are the maggots applied?**

The maggots can be applied in 2 ways:

1. In a bag (BioBag) which is like a teabag.
2. Directly onto your wound.

Your doctor or specialist nurse will decide which is best for you.

### **Maggots in a bag**

Maggots in a bag (BioBag) are most commonly used. The bag is applied to your wound. A piece of gauze moistened with sodium chloride (saline) and an absorbent dressing pad are then applied over it and secured. A barrier cream or dressing is also applied to the surrounding skin to protect it.

The maggots in the bag (BioBag) can stay on your wound for up to 5 days and are then removed. Each day the outer pad will be removed so the wound can be inspected. A new piece of gauze moistened with sodium chloride (saline) and an absorbent dressing pad are then applied; this is to prevent the maggots drying out.

### **Maggots directly onto the wound**

Maggots that are applied directly onto the wound ('Free range') are poured onto your wound. A net dressing is secured over them and a piece of gauze moistened with sodium chloride (saline) and an absorbent dressing pad are applied over this. A different dressing is also applied to the surrounding skin to protect it.

The maggots stay on your wound for 3 days and are then removed. Each day the outer pad will be removed so the wound can be inspected. A new piece of gauze moistened with sodium chloride (saline) and dressing pad are then applied; this is to prevent the maggots drying out.

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**While the maggots are in place you should not:**

- have a bath or shower or put your wound in water – this will destroy the maggots;
- sit with the wound too close to the fire or radiator – the maggots may become too dry;
- walk or apply pressure to the wound – this may crush the maggots.

## **What does it feel like?**

You should not be able to feel the maggots on your wound as they are only there to remove dead tissue but occasionally some patients with ischaemia (reduced blood supply) to the wound may experience increased pain. If this happens you can be given painkillers or the treatment can be stopped.

## **After the treatment**

Once the maggots have been removed your wound will be treated with normal dressings.

## **Contact details**

If you have any questions or concerns about this treatment please contact:

### **Vascular Nurses**

0121 507 5909

Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm

### **Tissue Viability Nurses**

0121 507 3278

Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm

## **Further information**

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) or [www.swbhengage.com](http://www.swbhengage.com), or follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

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### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Wounds UK, 'Debridement and wound healing using larval therapy', 2010
- British Medical Journal, 'Cost effectiveness analysis of larval therapy for leg ulcers', 2009
- Journal of Wound Care, 'Cost of managing chronic wounds in the UK, with particular emphasis on maggot debridement therapy', 2006
- World Wide Wounds, 'Case report: Maggot therapy in an acute burn', 2002
- Annual Review of Entomology, 'Medicinal maggots: an ancient remedy for some contemporary afflictions', 2000

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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