

Using maggots to help heal your wound (Larvae Therapy)

Information and advice for patients

What is larvae therapy?

Larvae therapy involves applying maggots to your wound to help remove dead tissue from the wound bed. Maggots can be used to treat dirty or infected wounds as they remove dead tissue and bacteria (germs). They work by releasing special chemicals on to your wound which break down dead tissue, leaving behind healthy tissue that can heal.

The maggots used in this treatment are specially bred and are sterile so they cannot cause infection.

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 risk of 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 dressings to clean/heal your wound. 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?

A protective barrier cream or dressing is applied to the surrounding skin.

The maggots are contained within a mesh bag called a Bio Bag. This is applied to the wound which is then covered with an absorbent dressing pad and secured.

The maggots in the Bio Bag 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, and a clean outer pad will be applied.

While the maggots are in place you should not:

- Have a bath or shower or put your wound in water – this will kill the maggots.
- Sit with the wound too close to the fire or radiator – the maggots may become too dry.
- Depending on the location of your wound walking or applying pressure to the wound may crush the maggots.

Will I notice anything different during maggot therapy?

The wound may become slightly wetter than usual, and this discharge may be darker in colour; this is due to the maggots breaking down the dead tissue.

If there is a lot of dead tissue in the wound you may notice an increase in smell, this is due to the activity of 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.

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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 the nurse looking after you.

Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website:

Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

www.swbh.nhs.uk

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- All Wales tissue viability nurse forum (2013) *All Wales guidance for the use of larval debridement therapy*. Available at: <https://www.wounds-uk.com/download/resource/5850> (Accessed 15 September 2022).
- Pagnamenta, Fania. (2013). Using maggots to clean wounds, *Wound essentials*, 8 (1), pp. 13-16. [Online] Available at: <https://www.wounds-uk.com/download/resource/1222> (Accessed 15 September 2022).
- Nigam, Y. (2021). The principles of maggot therapy and its role in contemporary wound care. *Nursing Times*, 39-44.

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ML5069

Issue Date: October 2022
Review Date: October 2025