

7. Wound cleansing

The aim of cleansing is to create the optimal local conditions for a wound to heal by removing exudate, debris such as dressing residue, slough and necrotic tissue. (Cutting, 2010)

Wound cleansing should only be considered following a thorough assessment of the wound. If the disturbance to the wound bed is not justified, then the wound is probably best left alone (Lloyd-Jones, 2012)

The most common solutions, which are currently used, are sodium chloride 0.9% or tap water. The use of antiseptics are no longer recommended, as they are not effective and are potentially harmful (Main, 2008)

Practice Guidelines

- Irrigation is the preferred method of wound cleansing
- Irrigation solutions should be applied at approximately 37°C to prevent a drop in the wound bed temperature
- Chronic wounds such as venous leg ulcers can be cleansed using tap water and an emollient
- Do not use cotton wool balls as they shed fibres prolonging the inflammatory phase, delaying healing (Lloyd-Jones, 2012)