

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Human Bites

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Most of us have never experienced a human bite (thank goodness!). While this is not common, it is an important subject to know something about. If this happens to someone you know this information will help you be of help to them. Ready? Here we go.

Two Kinds

1. The first is a “bite” over the knuckles when a tooth strikes a clenched fist as in a punch. Ouch, for both people, the hitter and the one punched.
Key point: It’s more than a skin injury. The wound usually goes through a tendon and into the joint. This makes it quite serious. Please remember this point!
2. The second kind is a real bite of the fingers or thumb. These are very dangerous too for the same reasons.

Yuck!!

Better to be bitten by an animal. You have all heard this. Why? Because human bites have much higher concentrations of both aerobic and anaerobic bacteria. In addition human bites can transmit HIV and hepatitis.

Symptoms

As you can see I am concentrating on the hand bites because that is what I am called to see. Bites can occur anywhere and I’ve seen a few, but that’s another story!

I know from experience that patients are often reluctant to tell me how it happened and they may have waited 2 or 3 days. But, I have to know what happened to be able to treat it properly.

- Irregular laceration
- Swelling, redness going up the hand and wrist
- Can’t move the finger or thumb properly
- May lack sensation if a nerve is cut
- Drainage is a bad sign
- Red streaks in the forearm

Tests

You need these. *Anything less is not adequate treatment.*

- Plain x-rays. Fractures are common with these injuries
- Culture swab of any drainage present.
- A WBC blood test might be ordered.

Treatment

- Never suture the wound.
- Local anesthetic used to examine the wound and culture it.

- Clean the bite and wash (scrub) it thoroughly including the entire hand with at least a liter of saline.
- Tetanus shot
- Antibiotic (my choice)
- Sterile dressings
- Follow up in 24 hours
- Possibly go to surgery depending on wound condition. I often take these injuries to surgery. Sadly, many bite wounds are not treated in this way and by the time the patient comes to me the wound is a mess.

Our goal is quality, highest standards and best outcomes.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Archive

I hope what you have read has raised questions. No problem!

Please log onto www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It has a huge amount of musculoskeletal information in the Website and the Archive of all previous Argus articles.

Check it out and be amazed what you can learn.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush