Dear Alice,

I have noticed lately that wounds such as cuts are healing much more slowly than before. I have also noticed that I am scarring more. For example, a tiny hole in my hand has developed a scar that is four times the size of the actual injury, and it is slightly raised. Am I missing something in my diet that is causing this? Or could it be an effect from on-going stress and anxiety? I am a vegetarian with some vegan tendencies, and I take a multi-vitamin every day or so.

Answer

Dear Reader,

While wound healing follows a specific step-by-step process in the body, not all wounds heal equally. Healing is a complex process influenced by both physiological and psychological factors, including stress, sleep, and nutrition. Moreover, individual factors influence how quickly your body is able to heal, including age, smoking, and infections. For a basic rundown of the healing process, read How do wounds, cuts, scrapes, lacerations heal? [2]

One of the major ingredients to healing is a healthy diet. This includes appropriate amounts of grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, proteins, and small amounts of fats and sweets. Additional calories, proteins, vitamins A & C, and zinc are highly beneficial to the body during healing. What to eat? [3] contains more information on eating a balanced diet. For information about a vegetarian diet in particular, check out the Go Ask Alice! vegetarianism archive [4]. Remember, such diets are not only meant for wound healing, but for a generally healthy lifestyle as well.

Stress, anxiety, and depression can be large inhibitors for healing, particularly for patients with chronic wounds. If your initial injury entailed a trip to your health care provider, you may want to speak with them about the emotional stress associated with the injury. Stress can cause physical changes within the body, which can also weaken a person's general health as well. People who feel more stress tend to produce:

- Lower levels of cytokines, or compounds which travel to the injury site and start the healing process
- Higher levels of the hormone cortisol, which suppresses the immune system and slows down healing
How has your sleep been lately? Remember those compounds, cytokines, mentioned above? Those are released during sleep. Not only do cytokines help fight infection, but they regulate deeper sleep. In addition to cytokines, there are other infection-fighting cells that are reduced when people experience sleep deprivation. It might be worth your while to prioritize your zzz's!

Learning how to manage your stress, get sufficient amounts of sleep, and maximize your nutrient intake can facilitate the healing process and help you get back into tip-top shape. Happy healing!

Alice!

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Body Maintenance
Injuries

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