Nail Bed Laceration, Complex

Nail laceration means a cut or break in the nail, nail bed, and/or the surrounding areas. Nail bed lacerations are commonly caused by:

- Crush injuries between large objects.
- A sharp cut to the fingertip or toe.
- Tearing injuries (*avulsions*) to the tips of the fingers and/or toes.

Complex wounds may involve loss of part or all of the nail or nail bed. Nail bed lacerations may also result in a painful collection of blood under the nail (*hematoma*).

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE

To relieve pain and help your caregiver see how bad the injury is, local anesthesia may be used. The caregiver may apply a *tourniquet* (compression bandage). A tourniquet helps to reduce the bleeding from the wound and makes it easier to examine the injury.

Before repairing the injury, other things may be suggested. These include:

- X-rays.
- Antibiotics may be started.

LET YOUR CAREGIVER KNOW ABOUT:

- Allergies.
- Medicines taken including herbs, eye drops, prescription medicine, over the counter medicine, and creams.
- Use of steroids (by mouth or creams).
- Use of aspirin or blood-thinning medicines
- Previous problems with anesthetics or novocaine.
- Possibility of pregnancy, if this applies.
- History of blood clots (*thrombophlebitis*).
- Previous surgery.
- Other health problems.
- History of bleeding or blood problems.

TREATMENT/PROCEDURES

The exact treatment will depend on the details of the injury. Your caregiver may do the following:

- If a broken bone is found, it may be straightened. This helps the chances of growing back a good nail.
- Repair, realign, and close the wound in the nail bed with stitches that dissolve on their own (*absorbable sutures*).
- If the nail is not lost, your caregiver may re-insert the nail (if intact) after repairing the nail bed. The nail is sometimes held in place with stitches. Sometimes, a small hole is made in the nail to allow for normal drainage of fluid and/or blood.
- If the nail is lost, your caregiver may use a small piece of silicone or special gauze to cover the nail bed and protect it while healing.

RISKS & COMPLICATIONS OF THE PROCEDURE

- Nail gets deformed or splits.
- Scars form on nail bed.
- Nail “wasting”- nail gets smaller and may lift up from nail bed.
- The back end of the nail **remains** attached but the rest of the nail does not stick. Despite this, the nail does not fall off.
- Infection.
- Bleeding.
- New nail never grows in.
- Injured area remains painful.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

Your caregiver may dress the wound with *non-adherent* (not sticky) material and antibiotic/antiseptic ointment. The wound may be dressed in a bulky wrap. A finger cap splint may be used for increased protection. Your caregiver may also recommend pain relievers and/or antibiotics.

YOU MIGHT NEED A TETANUS SHOT NOW IF:

- You have no idea when you had the last one.
- You have never had a tetanus shot before.
- Your cut had dirt in it.

If you need a tetanus shot, ***and you decide not to get one***, there is a rare chance of getting tetanus. Sickness from tetanus can be serious. *If you got a tetanus shot, your arm may swell, get red and warm to the touch at the shot site. This is common and not a problem.*

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- If the fingernail was preserved, you may be asked to not change the dressing for 5-7 days, unless there is oozing from the site. Your caregiver will give you specific instructions.
- If the nail was lost, the first dressing may need to be changed within 12-24 hours. This may help prevent unwanted "sticking" of the dressing to the nail bed.
- When possible, keep your hand/foot elevated above the level of the heart.
- When changing the dressing, your caregiver may ask you to gently clean the wound with soap and water before putting on a new dressing.
- When changing the dressing, apply antibiotic ointment if advised by your caregiver.
- To prevent stiffness, you may be asked to move your hand or foot normally. Your caregiver will give you specific instructions.
- Take all medicine, as prescribed by your caregiver.
- **Do not smoke as it may affect the healing process.**

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You notice oozing or discharge from the injured site.
- Your pain is not relieved despite taking prescribed medicines.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop severe bleeding.
- You develop severe pain not controlled with medicines prescribed.
- The skin around the injury is turning dark blue or black.

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