Be Wound Aware Education Series

Warning signs of wounds with Alix Clarke

Hi, I'm Alix Clarke, a Clinical Nurse Specialist working in wound care. Today we're going to talk about the warning signs of wounds. A little redness close to a wound is normal while it's healing. But if the redness spreads, gets brighter, or moves away from the wound, that's a sign to get it checked. If the skin looks tight, shiny, or if you notice red lines going up your arm or leg, it could mean infection. Check the skin around your wound every day so you can spot any changes early. Taking a quick photo on your phone each day can help you see if the redness is spreading or getting worse. It's an easy way to check your wound's progress. Another warning sign is pain. Most wounds hurt a bit, especially at the start. The pain should slowly settle as the wound heals. If it keeps getting worse, feels different, or comes back after it had eased, that's not normal.

Pain

Pain that wakes you up at night or stops you from moving around is also a warning sign. Increasing pain can be one of the first signs that the wound isn't healing properly, or that an infection is starting and it's time to seek medical advice.

Swelling

Now let's talk about swelling. A small amount of swelling can be normal, especially after an injury or surgery, and it should slowly go down. However, if the swelling spreads up your arm or leg, or if the skin feels hot, often it could mean infection or fluid build-up. If pressing on the area leaves a dent, or if it looks puffier than the other side, get it checked.

Fluid

Also pay attention to any fluid from the wound. Clear or pale yellow fluid is usually okay, but if it turns green, thick, or smells bad, it's a sign of infection and you should get it looked at.

Warmth

The final warning sign is warmth. A bit of warmth around the wound can be part of normal healing, but if it gets hot, spreads, or doesn't cool down after rest or a light cold compress, that could be a sign of infection. Compare it with your other limb. If one side feels much hotter, it's worth getting checked.

Key Takeaways

The final take-home messages are:

- look out for redness, pain, swelling, warmth, or any changes in fluid.
- If anything spreads, smells bad, looks worse, or just doesn't feel right, see your nurse, GP, or pharmacist.
- Getting help early gives you the best chance to heal well and avoid complications.