

# GEARING UP: Rather Sweat than Bleed

Written by John Briscoe



In this really hot weather many riders are tempted not to wear their kit. Most times nothing happens and you arrive at your destination somewhat more refreshed than had you been wearing your jacket, pants, gloves and boots. Two of our customers experienced horrific accidents and ended up with serious injuries! In both cases they thought "it's so hot, I'll take the chance". Today both of them swear blind they'll never do it again!

I came across this interesting article (acknowledgement to the Australian Cyclist) that explains what happens with skin injuries.

"Your skin is one of your largest organs but it is not made up of a single tissue. Structurally it has two major components: the outer epidermis and a deeper, thicker part called the dermis. Under the epidermis, the dermis is connective tissue containing collagen and elastin fibres and is rich in blood vessel and nerve endings. Under the dermis the subcutaneous tissue attaches the skin to the underlying structures such as muscle or bone.

The shallowest wounds in an accident fail to penetrate the epidermis and leave a reddened but dry graze that looks a lot like sunburn. These superficial grazes usually heal quickly and without a lot of management, because the epidermal cells are stimulated to divide and mature more quickly.

Deep grazes usually penetrate to the dermal layer in the centre of the wound, and with the loss of the outer keratinised cells the wound will start to bleed and weep. It also hurts a lot as you have taken the top off some of the nerve endings. This is not the sort of graze you can just grit your teeth and ignore.

Like a lot of things in motorcycling, how to manage 'roasties' is steeped in legend, tall tales and bad science. Old-school theory is to clean the wound and then get it to dry out as quickly as possible by using methylated spirits or hydrogen peroxide. This is probably why we think of old

school motorcyclists as tougher than nails - and sometimes lacking the good sense God gave little chickens.

Sure, we agree that cleaning the wound with iodine scrubbers or gauze soaked with 0.9 sodium chloride (salty water) is the best way to avoid infection and tattooing (the marks left by embedded dirt after the wound heals). Light scrubbing with these solutions may be unpleasant but necessary.

We should probably advise to not scrub too vigorously, as this can cause more tissue damage, but considering the wounds we have cleaned on our own limbs and those of others, the pain is usually enough to limit the intensity. (If you wake up on the bathroom floor with a sodium chloride bottle in one hand and a piece of gauze in the other, you're rubbing too hard.)

But it's once the wound is clean that we differ from the old ideas. Drying the wound out certainly stops the amount that it weeps in the first couple of days but it restricts the speed at which skin cells grow to repair the wound. After a couple of days, that thick tough scab formed by the drying process tends to pull, itch and crack. The result is lots of pain, prolonged weeping and longer recovery time.

We recommend you keep 'roasties' moist. All the research says keeping the wound moist will let skin cells regenerate the fastest. Some motorcyclists prefer to use antiseptic creams such as Savlon or Bepanthen to reduce the chance of infection while others swear by Polysporin.

Once cleaned and moistened use gauze pads and a crepe bandage to cover it, but far better are the new generation of synthetic dressings. The pad can absorb up to 22 times its weight in fluid so it stops the healthy tissue around the wound edges from becoming damaged by too much moisture. Some of these dressings come attached to an incredibly thin patch of clear adhesive dressing that can stay securely attached for days. These pre-impregnated dressings mean you don't need any ointment and they stay attached during showering and exercise.

Most medical professionals recommend changing dressings every two days but stories of removing the dressing to reveal clean, pink skin after a week and a half of normal showers, with no itching, no stained clothes and very little pain, are now well established among motorcyclists.

The moral of the storey is to remember to wear your kit all the time (ATGAT) - it's a whole lot easier to sweat than to try and fix your body!

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