Don't Get Scarred for Life

by Emily Listfield

SOMETIMES THE WORST part of an injury is what's left behind after it heals. You want to get over the pain, not have a scar as a permanent reminder. Cuts and scrapes can't be avoided, but with a few simple steps, you can prevent them from leaving a lifelong mark.

First, assess the severity of your wound. "If there is persistent bleeding or possible nerve damage, or if the cut penetrates through the full depth of the skin or is on your face, you should always seek medical attention," says Dr. Yael Halaas, a plastic surgeon in New York.

Keep your cut covered, clean, and moist

Less serious injuries can be treated at home. In the great debate over whether it's better to let a cut breathe or keep it covered, medical opinion comes down firmly in favor of bandages. "Wounds heal best in a clean, moist environment," Dr. Halaas says. "Avoid excess motion or tension on the wound, and stay out of the sun. It can cause further discoloration." She also advises that you skip cosmetic cover-ups for the first few weeks to let the cut heal. "Makeup can be too heavy and potentially contaminated to put on a wound," she explains.

Within one to two weeks after the cut has healed (or, if you've had stitches, after they are removed),