

## Science or Snake oil: do Band-Aids really 'heal cuts twice as fast'?

Written by Nick Santamaria, Professor of Nursing Research, Skin Integrity and Wound Care, University of Melbourne

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Don't believe the hype. Band-Aids might protect minor cuts but there's no publicly available evidence they speed up healing. Johnson & Johnson Pacific Pty Ltd/The Conversation

Everyone wants wounds to heal quickly, whether it's a paper cut or a grazed knee. So it's easy to be swayed by marketing claims on packs of adhesive bandages, and on signs in your local pharmacy, that promise faster healing.

Band-Aid's pack of 50 plastic adhesive bandages, for instance, displays the [claim](#) the product:

Heals cuts twice as fast.

And Band-Aid's pack of ten so-called "Advanced Healing" adhesive bandages has the [claim](#) they promote "faster healing".

In store, you might see promotional displays that promise Band-Aids are:

Clinically proven to heal wounds faster.

But twice as fast as, or faster than what? And if this is clinically proven, who's proved it?

## How do wounds heal?

Wounds heal themselves because of a [complex process](#) at the site of the injury. There are three main phases: inflammation, proliferation and maturation.

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Think of cutting your finger. The first thing that happens is the wound bleeds and eventually a blood clot forms and the bleeding stops. The area of injury is swollen and tender to touch. This is the inflammation phase.



Where's the evidence Band-Aids pack of ten 'Advanced Healing' adhesive bandages 'promote faster healing'? [Johnson & Johnson](#)

Then it's the proliferation phase. Over the next few hours, the blood clot becomes harder and a scab forms at the surface.

Below this scab, your body starts the process of healing the injury by sending in cells to fight infection.

That's when your body begins to lay down collagen fibres (fibres of structural protein). These act like a simple scaffold to stabilise the damage and pull together the sides of the wound. This phase is also when new blood vessels grow in the wound.

The third phase of healing, maturation, takes around four to seven days after the injury for a small, uncomplicated cut. This involves a continual strengthening of the previously damaged area and new tissue replacing areas that have been damaged.

The final outcome is the wound is repaired, the scab falls off and there is usually little to no scarring.

This final phase can be more than a year for extensive wounds because our body continues to remodel the wound by breaking down the initially deposited collagen and replacing it with a structure that more closely resembles the original tissue.

This is why you often see a scar reduce over a period of time from one that's raised and hard to one that's less obvious.

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### Can Band-Aids speed up this process?



Band-Aid's recent in-store display at Chemist Warehouse says its products are 'clinically proven to heal wounds faster'. Courtesy Prof Ken Harvey, Author provided

This takes us back to the original question of whether Band-Aids can speed up the process of wound healing.

Is there something about these adhesive plasters that can speed up the processes of inflammation, proliferation and maturation that we've described?

And where are the trials to back they are "clinically proven" to do so?

The answer is we don't know.

In correspondence from the supplier, Johnson & Johnson Pacific Pty Ltd, seen by the author, the company says:

With regards to the "heals two times faster" claim, we stand by our position that evidence does exist to support the claim.

The supplier does not clarify what its evidence relates to, namely whether it's comparing Band-Aids to other adhesive bandages or to using no bandage at all.

But the company describes the evidence as "ageing" so it says it's phasing out this claim. Until it does so, it's likely to remain on old stock on pharmacy and supermarket shelves.

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What about the “clinically proven” claim?

We stand by our decision that our ‘clinically proven’ claims are supported with robustly designed clinical trials.

But the company says these trials are unpublished and again, the company says it’s phasing out this claim.

The company continues by saying such studies are “commercial in confidence”, meaning we don’t have access to them, so none can be independently verified.

## What should you do with a minor cut?

There are simple things you can do to [help a minor cut heal](#) .

- Wash the wound with clean water
- apply a little pressure initially to help stop the bleeding
- cover the injury with a clean dressing, and
- protect the wound from additional trauma or mechanical force.

This is where Band-Aids and other brands of adhesive bandage might be appropriate. They protect the area from additional injury and limit exposure to dirt and other potential contaminants.

But as “clinically proven” to help cuts “heal twice as fast”, in the absence of any peer reviewed evidence, at best this is an unsubstantiated claim and probably just marketing hype. Science or snake oil? Verdict: snake oil.

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*Correspondence mentioned in this article relates to a letter between Johnson & Johnson Pacific Pty Ltd and Professor Ken Harvey, from Monash University, on a related matter. Excerpts are used with his permission.*

*Nick Santamaria receives funding from Australian Commonwealth Government Cooperative Research Centre for Wound Management Innovation and Molnlycke Health Care AB. He is affiliated with the World Union of Wound Healing Societies.*

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