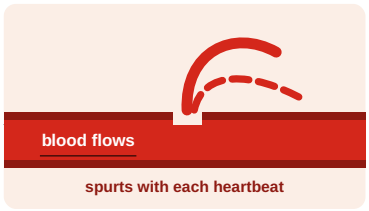
SafeServe First Aid

BLEEDING EXPLAINED

Types of bleeding: what you will see

How a bleed looks depends on the type of blood vessel that has been damaged. Knowing the three types helps you recognise how serious it is, but **the first aid for heavy bleeding is the same for all of them**.

Three types of bleeding

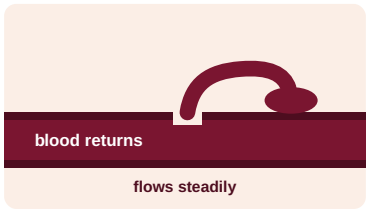


MOST DANGEROUS

Arterial

say: ar-TEER-ee-al

Arteries carry oxygen-rich blood away from the heart. Blood is bright red and spurts in time with the heartbeat. A lot of blood can be lost very quickly.

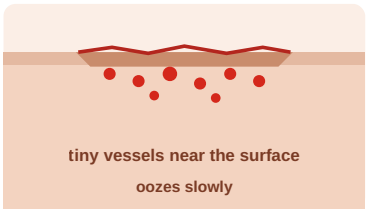


CAN BE HEAVY

Venous

say: VEE-nus

Veins carry blood back to the heart. Blood is darker red and flows steadily rather than spurting. It can still be heavy, especially from a large vein.



USUALLY MINOR

Capillary

say: ka-PILL-a-ree

Capillaries are tiny vessels close to the skin. Blood oozes slowly from a graze or shallow cut and often stops on its own.

Do not rely on colour. In a real emergency the blood can be hard to judge, and bleeding can be a mixture of types. Treat the amount of blood being lost: if bleeding is heavy or will not stop, give the same first aid whatever type you think it is.

First aid for life-threatening bleeding

1. **Call 999**
   Get help on the way straight away. Use speakerphone so your hands stay free.
2. **Press firmly**
   Apply firm, direct pressure to the wound with your hand, a pad or any clean material.
3. **Dress it**
   Press a dressing onto the wound, packing it in if needed. Once it is under control, apply a pressure dressing.
4. **Tourniquet**
   Only if trained and bleeding from a limb will not stop with pressure. Place 5 to 7cm above the wound, not over a joint. Note the time.

Also remember

- Do not remove an object stuck in the wound. Press around it.
- Do not wash a heavy bleed.
- Do not release a tourniquet. Leave that to a healthcare professional.

Pale, cold and dizzy? These can be signs of shock. Keep pressing on the wound, lie them down, raise their legs, and keep them warm.

Heavy bleeding that does not stop is an emergency.

Call 999, press firmly and keep pressing until help arrives.

Sources: Resuscitation Council UK First Aid Guidelines 2025; British Red Cross. Descriptions of arterial, venous and capillary bleeding are standard first aid teaching.