

Meredith Haab shares the techniques she learned and developed while caring for her mother, Gabrielle deHart Schwarz Haab, who suffered with cutaneous T-cell lymphoma-related lesions.

Techniques for removing stubborn bandages:

(Always consult with your physician before trying anything new)

- First: assemble everything you're going to need in one spot and right at hand: a tub of Vaseline, bandage scissors with the blunt tips, non-stick sterile cotton gauze pads for wound coverage, tubular elastic net dressings of varying sizes, your preferred bandage tape and/or self- adherent wrap.



- - Have a plastic tub of warm water, wash cloths, hand towels, and dry bath towels.
 - Keep these supplies together in your own kit or bag to save you time in the future.
 - Write down the brand names and sizes of the items you use. Make copies and give one to your pharmacy to make bulk reordering over the phone easier. Keep this list in your purse or with you at all Drs. appointments and hospital visits. Make changes and adjust it as you need to. All our medical providers helped us get the medical supply brands and sizes we needed and helped us to work with insurance to cover these necessary supplies.
- Now: To get a stuck bandage off with as little pain as possible - work the bandage off by a loose corner or edge a tiny bit at a time. Work Vaseline in and around the edges of the

bandage with your finger and very gently and slowly lift a bit of the outer vaselined-edge a little at a time.

- If the bandage is still stuck, apply more/more/more Vaseline and add a warm and very soaking wet washcloth on top. (Buy plain Vaseline, not medicated Vaseline, in a huge tub.) The washcloth should be soaking wet, that's the key secret. Set the soaking warm washcloth on top of the vaselined bandage and let it sit there for a while. (You will need to put a couple of dry towels around to catch the dripping water from the wet washcloths.) This is not a nice neat process.
- After some minutes, lift up the wash cloth – the stuck bandage may come off with it.
- For extra stubborn bandages, you may need to repeat with the Vaseline, slowly working it at the edges, then let it sit for a few minutes, then again- lifting a tiny bit as you can, then go to another edge of the bandage working your way around it, gently lifting anything loose, applying a warm soaked washcloth - repeating several times. This will work and it's as gentle as you can be.

When it's just too much to do each bandage individually or if a bandage is really stuck: this was my ultimate invention born of absolute necessity:

- Make a warm - not hot - steam bath by. Turn the shower on to hot, let the steam fill the room. Sit in the steamy shower on a medical supply plastic shower chair out of the direct shower spray. Angle the shower head to the wall or use a hand held nozzle that would lay on the floor of the shower.
- Sit naked with towels draped all over your body and the Vaseline covered bandages.
- After a few minutes, see what bandages came off on their own when slowly and carefully lifting up a draped towel.

- Repeat as necessary: Recover with the towels again and sit for a few more minutes. If it gets too warm, open the bathroom door a bit but keep the shower door closed to help lower the temperature without chilling the person sitting in the enclosed shower.
- If there's a large bandaged area or some stubborn bandages left at this point, use the hand held shower head, with warm water on low (never hot or cold water), and let the warm water run gently and lightly over the towels that are draped over legs, torso, and arms with bandages underneath. This should be very gentle and indirect. Never let skin or bandages be directly exposed to the warm water or steam. Always have towels draped over your body and vaselined bandages.
- If a bandage needs to come off but won't, I would NOT start directly at that bandage. Instead, I'd approach it indirectly. For example, if on a calf, start with soft warm water at the toes, then foot. Slowly move up the towels draped over the legs and softly soak the ankle area towel – all the while slowly and gently working your way all around in ever tightening circles to the most stubborn bandage. By that time, the towel should be very damp and the bandage should come off.

As the towels get wet, they act as very large warm compresses. All bandages came off in this way and Mom was clean. A nurse and I would bundle Mom up in clean dry towels, gently pat her dry around the lesions, apply any ointments and bandages, and then she was tired and ready for a nap. We all were!

My last personal tip is: Never, never rip off a bandage all at once, quickly – like we do to remove old band aids from healed cuts. It's extremely painful. I had to remind other caregivers: the lesions were the cancer – not a healing cut or burn. It had to be treated differently – like cancer- not like a wound that healed with exposure to air.