



100 YEARS OF ADHESIVE BANDAGES

In 1920, Josephine Knight Dickson complained to her husband, Earle, about the frequent nicks, burns, and cuts she was suffering while cooking and working in their home. At the time, the only real option for covering a small wound was to use separate gauze or cotton balls and adhesive tape. Each “bandage” would have to be personally cut and sized, inevitably falling off within an hour or two of application. The lack of options for hygienic wound coverings combined with no availability of antibiotics yet at the time meant infection posed a serious risk. Fortunately for Knight Dickson, Earle worked for Johnson & Johnson as a cotton buyer and immediately began brainstorming what sort of supplies he could use to make a simple, sanitary covering for his wife’s injuries that would stay firmly in place as she carried on through her daily activities.

Bringing home antiseptic cotton gauze and surgical adhesive tape that was included in Johnson & Johnson’s suite of sterile surgical products, Dickson took a piece of the gauze and attached it to the center of a piece of the tape, then covered it with crinoline to keep it from sticking to itself. From there, he rolled the tape into a ready-to-go spool that his wife would simply have to unfold and snip to the desired size.

Both Josephine and Earle were so impressed with the ease and efficacy of this innovative wound-covering solution that Earle decided to share the idea with his boss at Johnson & Johnson. Not long afterward, a small test batch of what the company called, BAND-AID Brand adhesive bandages were manufactured in exactly the way Earle had originally made them, in a roll that had to be cut with scissors. As with many new and cutting-edge products, educating people on how to use the newfangled wound coverings proved challenging, and sales at first were painfully slow. Johnson & Johnson remained committed to the Band-Aids and deployed traveling salesmen to teach pharmacists and physicians how to properly use

them. In 1924, new machinery allowed the company to mass produce and create the pre-cut, individually wrapped bandages we now know as Band-Aids.

The success of Band-Aids was so monumental and the product so ubiquitous, the name became synonymous with all other adhesive bandages. But since its invention, the global medical tapes and adhesive bandages market has grown to an estimated USD 9.35 billion in 2022 and many exceptional brands are making adhesive bandages while continuing to enhance wound care and innovate bandage technology. In the late 1990s, a company called Ebon-Aides launched the first adhesive bandages designed for people of color. For the first time, there was a bandage that could be considered “flesh-colored” for a diverse range of skin tones and now, thankfully, there are many brands that are inclusive of all races and ethnicities. Additionally, materials and adhesives have evolved to provide various levels of durability, breathability, and adhesion while a wide range of sizes and shapes offer wound care options specific to certain body parts including fingertips, knuckles, and knees. New bandage technology continues to emerge with the invention of bandages that clot just like blood (QuikClot) and “smart” bandages that give individuals an easy way to track their healing progress and signal infection concerns are being heavily researched.

The evolution of wound care and adhesive bandages has significantly improved in the 100 years since Earle Dickson first invented a solution for his wife’s cuts and scrapes. At the same time, the role of the school nurse has, to quote a timeworn and trite news headline, “become more than just bandaids”. Adhesive bandages, nevertheless, remain a much-needed supply in schools, and the wide range of options now available provides a healing option for every student.