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# 5 Different Types of Medical Tapes and How to Use Them

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Updated November 7th, 2019 by [Peter Oldani](#)

Medical tapes come in handy during all sorts of situations, and different types of medical tapes are best for different applications.

When building a [portable first aid kit](#), using a one-size-fits-all approach will help conserve valuable space and weight, but for a larger kit or home use other tapes will be useful to address a wider range of needs.

The medical tape that meets your needs is ultimately your decision, so I will lay out my top picks and the advantages/disadvantages to all of them.



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## 1 3M Medical Transpore Tape

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On the ambulance, this was the one that always ran out first, leaving a box full of useless, hard-to-tear tapes for the unlucky guy who got there last.

When it comes to versatility, efficiency, and overall quality, few medical tapes outperform 3M Transpore Tape. It is the strongest adhesive tape for skin that I have found.

1. **Sticks to anything:** While it's specifically designed for medical purposes, it will stick to anything. It needs to be applied dry, but it sticks through sweat, hair, and blood no problem.
2. **Waterproof:** You can go swimming or take a shower and this medical tape will stay on.
3. **Made with pores:** It is covered in a grid-like pattern of tiny holes that give it some unique properties. Sweat and body fluid will pass right through it without causing it to come off. Air can reach the skin underneath it. Its pores allow you to tear in a straight line both across and lengthwise in order to customize the width.

4. **Easy to tear:** Unlike many cloth tapes, 3M Transpore rips easily using your fingers both horizontally and vertically.
5. **Strongest adhesive tape for skin:** If you need to take it off, you don't necessarily want the strongest tape, but sometimes the strongest is the best.



Although Transpore tape is useful and versatile, it is not perfect for every application.

1. **Leaves residue:** 3M Transpore leaves behind a sticky residue around the edges when it is taken off your skin. According to product reviews, Goo Gone or similar products will remove the residue of this medical tape. Left to itself the residue will come off after several days of showering and daily activity.
2. **Removal can hurt sensitive skin:** Transpore tape can pull out hair or leave residue that will aggravate sensitive skin.

## ***Helpful Facts:***

- Comes in .5", 1", 2", or 3" by 10 yard (1.3, 2.5, 5, or 7.6cm x 9.1m) rolls
- Not stretchy
- Can be written on with marker
- Cannot be written on with pencil, pen

## ***Uses:***

- Securing gauze in place for cuts or burns
- Preventing chafing on your feet, nipples, or the inside of your thighs
- Securing a [SAM splint](#). Upon removal it rips foam off splint
- Butterfly stitch for closing cuts to prevent scarring

- Numerous other non-medical uses

## **Not Great For:**

- Daily bandage changes
- Sensitive skin

[Buy 3M Transpore Medical Tapes on Amazon ►](#)

## 2 **3M Nexcare Waterproof Tape**

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This medical tape solves several problems faced by others including the 3M Medical Transpore described above.

1. **Waterproof:** Its waterproof qualities only work when it's initially applied dry or to dry skin. If it's wet it will not stick, but after it dries out it will regain its stickiness.
2. **Binds strongly to skin:** this medical tape works well for blister prevention and chafing because it sticks surprisingly well to skin.
3. **Flexible:** I tried putting it on all of the hard-to-get places including in between my fingers and toes, the tips of my fingers, the palm of my hand, and the inside of my armpit. It was like a second skin. It conforms and flexes with the movements of your body.
4. **Non-adherent to hair:** This is both a pro and a con depending on its intended use. On the one hand it doesn't rip hair off when it's removed, making it good for sensitive skin or daily bandage changes. On the other hand it won't stick well to very hairy skin.



5. **No residue:** When removing it there is no sticky residue left behind on the skin.
6. **Easy to tear:** You will have no trouble ripping it off with your fingers.

3M Nexcare tape does have a couple disadvantages compared to the 3M Transpore tape that make it less than ideal depending on its intended use and frequency of use.

1. **Expensive:** 3M Nexcare is several times more expensive than 3M Transpore.
2. **Thicker:** Although Nexcare rolls are half the length of the Transpore rolls, Nexcare rolls are larger.
3. **Doesn't tear straight:** Transpore tape has perforations that cause it to tear in a straight line. Nexcare tears irregularly, so while it's easy to tear off, you can't tear it lengthwise without using scissors.

### ***Helpful Facts:***

- Comes in 1" or 1.5" (2.5 or 3.8 cm) x 5 yd (4.6 m) rolls
- Stretchy
- Can be written on in pen, marker
- Cannot be written on in pencil

### ***Uses:***

- Securing gauze in place for cuts or burns
- Preventing chafing or blisters on your hands, feet, nipples, or the inside of your thighs
- Covering cuts or cracks in irregular or heavily used places like in between fingers
- Protecting sensitive skin
- Underwater or while sweating
- Daily bandage changes

### ***Not Great For:***

- Sticking to hair or cloth
- Securing splints
- High strength applications

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### 3 3M Micropore Paper Tape

Some of the uses for Micropore paper tape overlap with Nexcare Absolute Waterproof, but it still fills an individual niche in the tape world.

1. **Gentle on skin:** It doesn't adhere so strongly that it will rip out hair or leave sticky residue. It's designed to be easily replaced on a daily basis with little to no irritation.
2. **Affordable:** this medical tape costs several times less than Nexcare Absolute Waterproof.
3. **Sticks to skin:** It sticks to skin well, and can stay on over the course of several days.
4. **Breathable:** It is permeable to air and will aerate the skin underneath.



Micropore paper tape is not for every application.

1. **Not waterproof:** It can handle some moisture, but it is not waterproof.
2. **Stiff:** It does not conform well to irregular parts of the body like in between fingers or toes.

### **Helpful Facts:**

- Comes in .5", 1", 2", or 3" (1.3, 2.5, 5, or 7.6 cm) x 10 yd (9.1 m) rolls
- Not stretchy
- Can be written on in pencil, pen, marker

### ***Uses:***

- Daily bandage changes
- Taping sensitive skin
- Labeling (dates, times, product information, etc)

### ***Not Great For:***

- Heavy exercise
- Underwater
- Irregular areas of the body
- Covering blisters/chafing

[Buy 3M Micropore Medical Tapes on Amazon](#) ►

## **4 3M Nexcare Durable Cloth Tape**

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This medical tape stands out, not for any of its individual aspects, but for its balanced approach to every category.

1. **Sticks well to skin or cloth:** Tapes that don't stick to hair, like the Nexcare Absolute Waterproof tape, also won't stick to cloth which can be a problem for securing dressings. Applied directly to skin it sticks well enough that it will rip out some, but not all, of your hair when removed.

2. **No residue:** Some of the stickier ones like duct tape and Medical Transpore tape will leave behind sticky residue on the skin that takes days to come off, but Nexcare Durable Cloth is residue free.

3. **Affordable:** Nexcare Durable Cloth is a similar price per length as compared to the cheapest 3M ones.

4. **Breathable:** Cloth tape is permeable to air, which promotes better healing for long term wound care.

5. **Straight tear:** It tears both lengthwise and across in a straight line, so that you can make it the perfect size without scissors.

6. **High strength:** this medical tape can be used to secure a [SAM splint](#) or to splint a broken finger to an unbroken finger. It does take off some of the SAM splint foam when removed, so for long term splinting applications it may be best to use an ACE pressure wrap or similar product instead.



Nexcare Durable Cloth tape is not for every application.

1. **Not waterproof:** Although this medical tape can handle some moisture, it is far from waterproof.
2. **Stiff:** It does not conform well to irregular parts of the body like in between fingers or toes. It also has a hard time flexing as skin loosens and tightens over moving joints.
3. **Difficult to tear:** It's more difficult to tear than Medical Transpore tape. The edges of cloth tape sometimes bunch up making it nearly impossible to tear. In that case it either needs to be cut or torn in a different spot.

### ***Helpful facts:***

- Comes in .75", 1", or 2" (1.9, 2.5, or 5 cm) x 10 yd (9.1 m) rolls



- Not stretchy
- Can be written on in pencil, pen, marker

### ***Uses:***

- Daily bandage changes
- Splinting bone fractures
- Labeling (dates, times, product information, etc)

### ***Not Great For:***

- Heavy exercise
- Underwater
- Irregular areas of the body
- Covering blisters/chafing
- Covering flexing joints like knuckles

[Buy 3M Nexcare Durable Cloth Tapes on Amazon ►](#)

## **5 Re Factor Tactical Cloth Trauma Tape**

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Cloth tape is often used in prehospital care to bandage wounds, secure splints, and fill in as a popular jury-rigging tool for whatever situation is on hand.

A useful hack for many EMTs is to tape a strip of cloth tape to your leg and write down the patients vitals on it. When you are finished, stick it to your patient so that the next caretaker who gets them knows how they're doing.

The idea is alright, but the execution is poor. The tape should really not have body temperature on it, and there is no space to write the time that vitals were taken. First

responders do not usually take body temperature, but the time that vitals were taken is very important. If you're using the list as a mnemonic, then it doesn't have some key information that you need. Considering it's quite a bit more expensive, it doesn't seem worth the money to me.

The standard tape has the following fillable entries:

- Body Temp
- Heart Rate
- Respiration Rate
- Blood Pressure
- Pulse Oximetry
- Glasgow Coma Scale
- Drugs
- Notes



It also comes in a military version that includes the MIST classification:

- **M**echanism of Injury
- **I**njuries Sustained
- **S**igns and Symptoms
- **T**reatment Given

You can find out more about this cloth trauma tape at [Re Factor Tactical's website](#).

**Buy Re Factor Tactical Trauma Tapes on Amazon.com**



## The Bottom Line

1. 3M Transpore tape is best used for emergencies because it's easy to use, and it gets the job done.
2. 3M Nexcare Absolute Waterproof tape is best for every day use and as blister protection because it can be used comfortably during daily activities.
3. 3M Micropore Paper is a cheap, effective, non-specialty tape that's best for every day use on regularly shaped areas of the body.
4. 3M Nexcare Durable Cloth tape is a strong, cheap wound care product that is best used for securing splints and daily bandage changes on regular shaped areas of the body.

### ***3M Medical Transpore Tape***

- **Pros:** versatile, compact, sticks to anything, tears easily, tears in straight line, affordable
- **Cons:** leaves residue, removal can irritate sensitive skin

### ***3M Nexcare Absolute Waterproof Tape***

- **Pros:** waterproof, flexible, stretchy, no residue, easy to tear, pain-free removal, sticks well to skin
- **Cons:** slightly bulky, doesn't tear straight, more expensive

### ***3M Micropore Paper Tape***

- **Pros:** gentle on skin, doesn't pull hair, no residue, sticks to skin, affordable, breathable
- **Cons:** not waterproof, not good for irregular areas

### ***3M Nexcare Durable Cloth Tape***

- **Pros:** sticks to skin or cloth, no residue, affordable, breathable, tears straight in both directions, high strength
- **Cons:** not waterproof, stiff, difficult to tear with fingers

## Tips and Suggestions:

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1. When securing a bandage don't be afraid to tape all the way around a limb if the tape isn't sticking well.
2. Fold a small tab of the medical or surgical tape over on itself to make its end easy to find.
3. Tape over places that rub inside your shoes to prevent blisters.
4. To cut medical tape and other bandages to shape, it is helpful to carry scissors, [trauma shears](#), or a [multitool](#) in your first aid kit.

## Infographic for Sharing:

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Additionally, we created an infographic that you can use to remember the advantages and disadvantages of several different medical tapes we evaluated in this article.

Feel free to download and share our infographic, just reference our site or link this article in your website.

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## Additional Resources

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1. [Adhesion charts that compare different 3M surgical tapes](#)
2. [Catalogue of 3M medical tapes](#)
3. [How to choose the right tape for your patient](#)

## 4. 3M Surgical Tape Comparison

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## ***What tape is appropriate for adhesive allergic patients?***

What tape is appropriate for adhesive allergic patients? I am a heart patient and tape is a huge issue for me. I have a dermatological condition known as bulous pemphigoid. About two years ago I was treated for it successfully. However, my symptoms have reappeared. I do avoid adhesives that are too sticky and I can tolerate cloth band-aids okay.

By: Carol Thompson on June 18th, 2019

[reply](#)

### ***Adhesive Allergy***

Carol,

All of the surgical tapes made by 3M are hypoallergenic and latex free [1]. This includes all of the tapes I reference in this article except for Refactor Tactical cloth tape. I do not know how these adhesives will interact with bullous pemphigoid, but maybe a good place to start would be softer adhesives. Then if those feel okay, you can try stickier tapes. Here is a link to [a chart that compares the adhesive strength of all 3M surgical tapes](#). I hope this helps.

[1] <http://multimedia.3m.com/mws/media/807033O/3m-surgical-tapes-product-pro...>

By: Peter Oldani on June 18th, 2019

[reply](#)

### ***Medical Surgical Tapes***

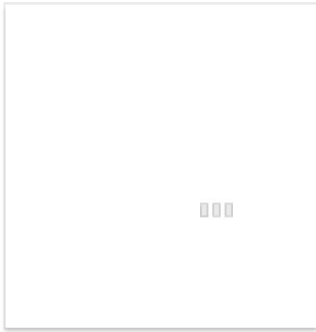
Thanks for sharing this amazing article on medical tapes and how can we use them when needed. I found it very helpful. I would be more than happy to share this post.

By: Luice Phillips on July 4th, 2019

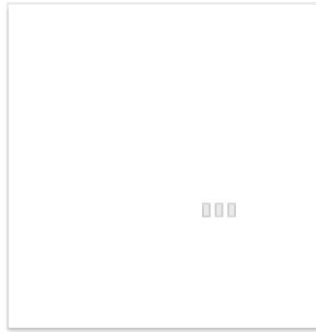
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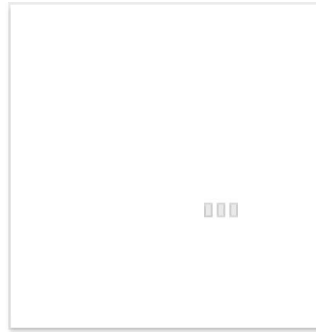
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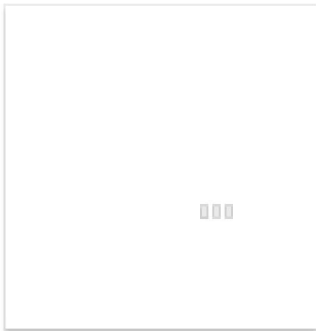
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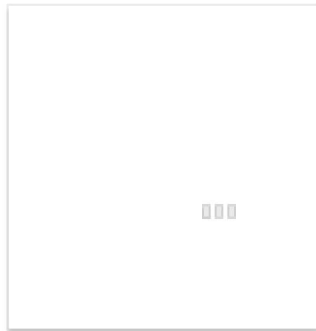
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### About the author



**Peter Oldani** graduated college with a B.S. in biomedical engineering, worked as an EMT to gain hands on experience in emergency medicine and completed active shooter training as part of New York State’s initiative to prepare civilian organizations for disaster response.

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