Tubular bandages have an important role in wound management to help protect skin from contact sensitivity and to keep dressings and creams in place. There is a confusing array of adhesive tapes available, and bandage skills are not always included in nurse training, although it is agreed that they should be.

Many dressings now incorporate adhesive backing, but there is still the need for bandages, especially where delicate skin may be affected by skin stripping from or sensitivity to adhesives. Bandages that are applied correctly can provide a safe, comfortable alternative to adhesives or dressings. However, poor technique of tight and bulky bandaging can increase the pressure on one spot, resulting in pain, oedema and damage to underlying tissues. The British Standards Institution (BSI) bandage classification stipulates that a retention bandage should “conform well to the body contours and permit free movement of limbs and joints without applying significant sub bandage pressure”. These are classed as type 1 bandages, while light support bandages fall into the type 2 category and are used to provide some compression to a limb.

Retention bandages are used to secure primary dressings, keep devices and intravenous lines tidy, help prevent patients from removing treatment or scratching, and to keep creams in place. Flat bandages have traditionally been used, but they may be difficult to apply to contoured areas of the body or over joints. Tubular bandages are easier to apply and are generally more comfortable for the wearer. Some tubular bandages (e.g., Tubigrip) exert some compression and are not usually recommended for simple dressing or device retention, especially where compression is contraindicated. Net bandages sometimes cause pressure points where the threads are knotted and are now used less frequently.

Criteria for the ideal retention bandage include:
- It is able to stay in place even with movement.
- It is quick and easy to apply and remove with little training.
- It is able to be repositioned easily.
- It is comfortable with a low risk of sensitivity.
- It is cost-effective.
- It is easily available.
- It is compatible with other products to complete treatment regimens.
- Acti-Fast is a new range of tubular bandages that are soft and conformable following the contours of the body, but with the ability to stay in place once applied. They are easy to apply and remove even by junior staff or patients and carers. This facilitates monitoring of a wound site or device with little disturbance to the patient or treatment. Indications for use are:
  - To retain dressings where adhesives are not advised.
  - To keep devices (e.g., splints or foot protectors) in place.
  - To keep intravenous lines tidy.
  - To provide a lining under some bandages or hosiery where contact sensitivity may cause problems for preferred treatment.
  - To apply over bandages to keep them in place.
  - To keep creams in place without soiling clothing and to help prevent scratching.
  - As part of the wet wrapping technique for the treatment of atopic eczema.

Application (see Figure 1)

- Measure the limb and choose the correct size of Acti-Fast bandage.
- When using the wet wrapping technique use emollients and steroids appropriately (see Activa Healthcare booklet).
- Cut the required length, roll the bandage into a mushroom shape and apply to the area.
- Bandages should always be applied from joint to joint.