

Emergency Medicine

Minor Burns

Information for patients



This leaflet has been written to help you look after your burn injury. The burn you have is classed as a superficial burn. This means that it has damaged the surface of your skin, causing redness and pain, but has not burnt any deeper.

Your burn has been assessed in the Emergency Department. It may have been covered with a dressing, which will need to be kept clean and dry. The dressing will need to be changed every two to three days. You will need to book an appointment with the nurse at your GP's surgery for this to be done. The dressing should also be changed if it accidentally becomes wet, begins to fall off or if fluid seeps through from your burn. You will need to wear the dressing until your wound is healed well enough for you to leave it uncovered. Your GP's nurse will be able to give you advice on this.

Do not prick any blisters that might appear, as the fluid in the blisters is protecting your skin and helping it to heal. Do not apply any creams, oils or ointments until the wound has healed. These can irritate or stain your skin and make you more likely to develop an infection. They are also unlikely to speed up the healing of your burn. Please do not apply a plaster or sticky or fluffy dressings, as this may damage your skin.

Signs to look out for

Occasionally, burns can become infected. The signs of this happening are:

- worsening pain
- a smelly discharge from the wound
- spreading redness surrounding the burn
- swelling or warmth around the wound.

Sometimes the symptoms of infection are feeling ill or developing a high temperature. If you develop any of these symptoms you should seek help immediately, either from NHS 111 (Freephone from landlines and mobiles), your GP, or at your local Emergency Department (if outside normal hours).

Healing and recovery

It is important to take regular over the counter painkillers if your burn is painful. It may help to take some painkillers half an hour before

a dressing change, to help with any discomfort. Remember not to exceed the dose shown on the packet or the instruction leaflet.

Stopping smoking can help your skin to recover, as smoking reduces blood flow to the skin, delaying healing. It is also important to follow a good diet, as this helps to reduce the chance of developing an infection and can help with the healing of your burn.

If your burn is on your arm or leg, it is important to try and raise the affected limb whenever possible, as this will help to reduce swelling. Try not to knock or scratch your burn, as the skin will be delicate and sensitive even after it has healed.

Once your burn wound is healed (which can take up to two weeks), the skin may become dry, itchy or uncomfortable. You are not likely to have a scar but your skin may remain red for a few more weeks. Moisturising regularly with a basic moisturising cream such as aqueous cream or a similar simple cream may be useful. Avoid using perfumed creams as these are likely to irritate your skin.

For the first eighteen months to two years after a burn, the area of skin may be very sensitive, particularly to sunburn. You should always make sure you use a high factor sunblock or cover the area when you are out in the sun, even if it is not warm, as the UV rays can still damage your skin.

First aid advice in case of future burns

If you or someone near you suffers a burn it is important to stop the burning process and remove any source of heat.

For chemical burns (such as bleach, cleaning products, cement and plaster) firstly remove all affected clothing. Brush the chemical off the skin if it is dry and then wash with large volumes of cool water.

For electrical burns it is important to make sure the victim isn't still connected to the electricity supply before you touch them or attempt first aid. Either switch off the electricity supply (plug socket or mains switch) or use a non-conductive (wooden or plastic, non-metal) item to move them away from the electricity supply.

Cool the wound under very cold running water for 20 minutes. You can also use iced water in a bowl. It is also a good idea to remove any rings, bracelets, watches, or other items that could become stuck if the area affected swells up. You can cover the burn with cling film

(unless it is on the face). We recommend using cling film as it means the burn can be seen easily without us having to keep removing a dressing, it won't stick to the burn, and prevents contact with the burn, including air wafting over it which can be painful. Do not wrap the cling film completely around a limb as it may become tight if swelling starts to develop.

If you are able to, you can take simple painkillers as soon as possible after suffering a burn.

You should always go to the Emergency Department for:

- electrical burns
- chemical burns
- burns to your hands, face or other sensitive areas that have caused blisters
- any burn that is larger than the size of the hand of the affected person
- burns that show white or charred skin.

You should also go to the Emergency Department if there are any other symptoms after a burn, such as difficulty in breathing after exposure to smoke.

Useful information

NHS Choices

Website:

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Burns-and-scalds/Pages/Introduction.aspx

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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March 2015
Review: March 2018
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