



BURNS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Injury to the skin from contact with heat, radiation, electricity, sunlight, or chemicals. Sometimes internal organs may also be injured. The risk of damage is greatest with infants and young children.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Thin or superficial burns (1st-degree burns) are limited to the upper skin layer. They cause redness, tenderness, pain, and swelling.
- Partial thickness burns (2nd-degree burns) affect deeper skin layers. Symptoms are more severe and usually include blisters.
- Full thickness burns (3rd-degree burns) involve all skin layers. Skin is white and appears cooked. There may be no pain in the initial stages.

CAUSES

- Rise in skin temperature from heat sources such as fire, steam, or electricity. Open flame and hot liquid are the most common causes.
- Tissue injury caused by chemicals or radiation, including sunlight.
- Lightning strikes can cause internal burns with few external signs.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress, carelessness, smoking in bed, or excess alcohol consumption. All of these make accidents more likely.
- Jobs involving exposure to heat or radiation. This includes firefighting, police work, or factory work.
- Faulty wiring.
- Hot water heaters set too high.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Fireproof your home. Install smoke alarms. Plan emergency exits and have regular fire drills.
- Wear protective gear around heat or radiation.
- Don't touch uncovered electric wires.
- Teach children safety rules for matches, fires, electrical outlets, cords, and stoves.
- Throw away extension cords with a pronged plug on one end and a bulb socket on the other end.
- If you have small children, put safety covers on outlets. Get rid of frayed cords.
- Buy flame-resistant sleepwear for children.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Most persons recover if the burns affect less than 50% of the body's surface.
- For less severe burns, skin usually heals in 1 to 3 weeks.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Infection.
- Shock, due to loss of fluids from the body.
- Major burns can cause lung, heart, and kidney problems, as well as death.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- For severe burns, call 911.
- See your health care provider for burns that aren't severe. The burn area will be examined and treatment given depending on the type of burn and size of the area affected. Special dressings and skin-care products may be prescribed.
- For minor burns treated at home:

Place the burned area in cold water, hold it under running water, or use wet compresses on it for 15 minutes (longer for chemical burns). This will reduce pain and swelling. Don't use ice on a burn.

Use an aloe vera cream or antibiotic ointment. Wrap the area loosely with sterile gauze dressing. This helps protect the area. Change the dressing each day.

Don't break blisters. This can cause infection.

Keep the burned area higher than the rest of the body, if possible.

- Emergency care and a hospital stay are usually needed for severe burns. Complications, such as lung damage from smoke, may need treatment. There are special burn centers for the most serious cases. Surgery may be needed to graft skin, and rehabilitation may be needed after burns start healing.

MEDICATIONS

- You may take acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain.
- Hospital care may include drugs, for pain, and dressings, to treat the burns and prevent infection. A tetanus booster will be needed if it is not up-to-date.

ACTIVITY

Resume normal activity as soon as possible. This will help speed recovery.

DIET

No special diet for minor burns. Severe burns may require use of a feeding tube until symptoms improve.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You have a burn that does not heal in 6 days.
- A child under age 2 has a burn, even if it seems minor.
- You develop chills, fever; increased pain, redness, swelling, or pus in the burn area.

