

# Caring for Minor Burns

## What causes burns?

In young children, most burns happen when a hot object or liquid is pulled off of the stove or countertop. Older children and teenagers typically get burns from playing with lighters, firecrackers, or gasoline. Adults can get burns from sun exposure, touching hot objects, and accidents.

## How can I prevent burns?

Most burns are accidental, so it's important to be careful in situations where you or your children can be exposed to the sun, flames, and hot objects and fluids.

- Set the temperature on the water heater in your house to less than 120°F (48.9°C).
- Always test bathwater.
- Never leave a child alone in the bathtub or near water faucets.
- Use the back burners of the stove when children are present.
- Never hold a child when working with or around hot objects.
- Do not leave a child around a fireplace without an adult.
- Check smoke alarms in your home every month.
- Keep matches, firecrackers, gasoline, and other explosives out of reach of children.

## How can I treat minor burns at home?

If you get a minor burn (one that is red and painful, but does not blister), apply cool water (not ice) to the area for five to 30 minutes. Do not put butter or oil on the burned skin. Cover the damaged skin with aloe vera or an antibiotic ointment (one brand: Neosporin), and apply gauze or a bandage. Do not pop blisters. You can take over-the-counter pain medicine, such as ibuprofen (one brand: Motrin) or naproxen (one brand: Aleve).

## Should I go to the doctor?

Call your doctor right away if you think your burn might be serious, if you have blisters, or if the area is very painful or does not heal quickly. Go to the emergency room if you have an electrical burn or a burn on your face.

## Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

Web site: <http://familydoctor.org/638.xml>

National Fire Protection Association

Web site: [http://www.nfpa.org/categoryList.](http://www.nfpa.org/categoryList.asp?categoryID=1491&URL=Safety%20Information)

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**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

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