

Burn Injuries: What You Should Know

What causes burns?

Anyone can get burned. In young children, most burns happen because of sun exposure (sunburn), their bathwater is too hot, or they pull hot items from the microwave or off of counters or stovetops. Older children and teenagers usually get burns from fires by playing with lighters, firecrackers, or gasoline. Adults often get burns from sun exposure, touching hot objects, or accidents.

Special attention should be paid to young children and older adults to prevent burns because burns happen more often in these age groups.

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 liquids.

- If outdoors, wear clothing that protects your skin and use a broad-spectrum sunscreen that is 15 SPF or higher.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours or earlier when sweating, swimming, or towel-drying.
- Set the temperature on the water heater in your house to lower than 120°F (48.9°C).
- Always test bathwater for people of all ages.
- 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.
- Keep chemicals, matches, and lighters locked and out of reach.
- Do not leave a child around a fireplace without an adult.
- Ensure electrical cords, appliances, and outlets are in working condition.
- Check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in your home every month.
- Ensure a fire extinguisher is easy to get to.

How can I treat minor burns at home?

If you get a superficial burn (one that is red and painful but does not blister), rinse it with cool running tap water for at least 20 minutes. Do not use ice. Aloe vera cream or antibiotic ointment (one example: bacitracin) can be put on the burn. Over-the-counter medicines, such as ibuprofen (one brand: Motrin) or naproxen (one brand: Aleve), may help control pain. If the burn blisters, it may be a deeper burn. Do not pop the blister. These burns can be treated with aloe vera cream and antibiotic ointments and then covered by a gauze or bandage.

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Should I go to the doctor?

Go to the emergency room if you have an electrical burn or if burns are in concerning areas of the body, such as the face, major joints, or genitalia. Call your doctor right away if the burn seems deep, the burn blisters, you have diabetes or are immunocompromised, the area is very painful, or the burn does not heal within two weeks.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Information Resource

<https://familydoctor.org/burns-preventing-burns-in-your-home>

American Burn Association

http://ameriburn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/nbaw-factsheet_121417-1.pdf

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