

Burns

The South Australian
Wound Management
Association

www.sawma.org.au



What can cause a burn

A burn is a type of wound that can result from:

- Heat - including contact burns (such as a hot iron, radiator or hot concrete), scalds (hot water or steam) and flame burns,
- Chemicals, such as a wart or corn cures, or strong acid or alkaline solutions
- Electricity.

What a burn looks like

A superficial burn is often blistered or pink in colour. Superficial burns are usually very painful. A deep burn is often white or sometimes black in colour. The centre of a deep burn might not be painful. Electrical burns are often more serious than they appear.

Who is at risk of burns

Minor burns are common. However, persons who cannot feel any part of their body (for example: persons with paraplegia or nerve damage to their feet - such as persons with diabetes - or persons following stroke) are at higher risk of burns as they cannot feel pain in the affected area. People at increased risk of collapse (for example persons with epilepsy or fainting spells) should take extra care.

How to help reduce the risk of burns

Avoid filling hot water bottles with boiling water or sitting too close to radiators.

Supervise children when they use microwaves, kettles and stoves.

Do not handle caustic chemicals or do electrical work unless you are trained to do so.

Do not add petrol or other flammable liquids to a fire.

Do not smoke around flammable liquids.

Wear footwear, sunscreen and a hat when outdoors.

Have a mixer tap installed in bathrooms to avoid scalds

How to treat a fresh burn

Run the area under cool tap water for at least 20 minutes for a heat (thermal) burn and at least 1 hour for a chemical burn.

'Burn Aid'™ can be applied to small burns if available.

Do not apply ice, creams, lotions or butter to a burn.

Remove any jewellery that is near the burn area.

Ongoing treatment of burn

Apply a non adherent dressing to small burns and change this regularly.

A soothing dressing such as a hydrogel or hydrocolloid can be used (ask your pharmacist or health practitioner for advice).

When to seek advice from a doctor

Any burn greater than the size of a 50c piece.

Any chemical or electrical burn.

If the burn is on the face, hands, feet, genitals or over a joint.

If the burn becomes painful or inflamed and this does not settle down in a couple of days.

If the drainage from the burn becomes excessive, smelly or discoloured.

If the burn becomes black or pale and white.

If the burn has not healed in two weeks or if the wound becomes larger.

If there are any other concerns regarding the burn.

This information is intended as a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a trained health professional.

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