



Burns

Patient and Family Education

What are burns?

Burns happen when the skin touches heat, chemicals or electricity. They are ranked by how deep they are in the skin.

First-degree burns:

- Are the most minor. Mild sunburn is an example.
- Cause the skin to be red, but not blistered.
- Are painful to touch.

Treatment:

Some general guidelines to follow at home include:

- Most first-degree burns can be treated at home.
- Gently run cool water over the burn area for about 10 minutes.
- Never put butter or oils on a burn.
- Gently clean the area and pat it dry.
- A doctor should see any first-degree burns on a baby that are larger than the baby's palm.

Second-degree burns:

- Involve deeper layers but not the entire skin.
- Cause skin to blister or look red and raw.
- Are painful to touch.

Treatment:

A doctor should see second-degree burns larger than a quarter and those on the face. If your child needs to see a doctor, the doctor can talk with you about specific care for your child. Clean and dress the burn as prescribed by the doctor.

Some general guidelines to follow at home include:

- Gently run cool water over the burn area for about 10 minutes.
- Do not break any blisters.
- Watch carefully for any signs of infection such as redness, swelling, yellow or green drainage or a bad smell. Also watch for red streaks moving away from the burn area.
- Keep the burn covered with a bandage such as Band-Aid[®] or sterile gauze.
- Gently clean and dress the burn every day. Use mild soap and pat dry. Do not rub the burn.

Third-degree burns:

- Are the most harmful. The skin is completely burned.
- Have a whitish or charred area.
- Do not hurt when touched because the nerves in the skin have been destroyed.
- May cause your child to need skin grafts or special care if the burn is larger than a half-dollar.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice for your child. Always consult your child's doctor or other healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns about the care or health of your child. A Children's Healthcare of Atlanta pediatric advice nurse is available 24 hours a day at 404-250-KIDS.

Burns, continued

Treatment:

Your child's doctor will talk with you about specific care for your child. Some general guidelines include:

- The doctor should see all third-degree burns, even small ones.
- Be sure to return for a check-up or dressing change as your child's doctor orders.

Treatment for pain for all burns:

Even small burns can be painful. Your child may be irritable (grouchy) and even vomit once or twice.

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol[®], Tempra[®], Panadol[®]) or ibuprofen (Motrin[®], Pediaprofen[®], Advil[®]) may be given for pain. Follow the directions on the box carefully or ask your doctor how much medicine to give.
 - Do not give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.
 - Do not give acetaminophen to babies less than 3 months of age without a doctor's order.
 - Do not give ibuprofen to babies less than 6 months of age without a doctor's order.

How can I help prevent burns?

- Children 5 years old and under are at the greatest risk for burns. Scald burns from a hot liquid in the kitchen and bathroom are the most common burns.
 - Watch over your child in the kitchen at all times, do not allow your child to cook on the stove by himself.
 - Do not allow your child to use the microwave until about the age of 10 years. Teach him how to use it safely.
- To prevent scalds in the kitchen, turn pot handles inward and use the back burners of the stove. Keep hot liquids away from the edges of the tables and counters. Never hold your child while cooking or holding a hot drink.
- To prevent scalds in the bathroom, never leave your child alone in the tub. Lower the thermostat in your hot water heater to 120°F. Test the water temperature before placing your child into the bath.
- Keep appliances such as irons, crock pots and curling irons away from your child's reach.
- Always apply sunscreen on your child when outdoors.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if:

- You see signs of infection at or near the burn, such as increased redness, swelling, pain, bloody, yellow or green drainage or a bad smell. Clear drainage may be normal for an open burn or when blisters pop.
- You see red streaks moving away from the burn area.
- Your child does not feel better after taking medicine for pain.
- Your child develops a fever (temperature over 100.3°F).

Also call if you have any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

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