

# Burns

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Burns are divided into three categories, according to their severity. *First-degree burns* are the mildest and cause redness and perhaps slight swelling of the skin (like most sunburns). *Second-degree burns* cause blistering and considerable swelling. *Third-degree burns* may appear white or charred and cause serious injury, not just to the surface but also to the deeper skin layers. Sunburn, hot-water scalds, and those due to fire, electrical contact, or chemicals can all cause burns and permanent injury and scarring to the skin.

## Treatment

Your immediate treatment of a burn should include the following:

- As quickly as possible, soak the burn in cool water. Don't hesitate to run cool water over the burn long enough to cool the area and relieve the pain immediately after the injury. Do not use ice on a burn. It may delay healing. Also, do not rub a burn; it can increase blistering.
- Cool any smoldering clothing immediately by soaking with water, then remove any clothing from the burned area unless it is stuck firmly to the skin. In that case, cut away as much clothing as possible.
- If the injured area is not oozing, cover the burn with a sterile gauze pad or a clean, dry cloth.
- If the burn is oozing, cover it lightly with sterile gauze if available and immediately seek medical attention. If sterile gauze is not available, cover burns with a clean sheet or towel.
- Do not put butter, grease, or powder on a burn. All of these so-called home remedies actually can make the injury worse.

For anything more serious than a superficial burn, or if redness and pain continue for more than a few hours, consult a physician. All electrical burns and burns of the hands, mouth, or genitals should receive immediate medical attention. Chemicals that cause burns also may be absorbed through the skin and cause other symptoms. Call the [Poison Help Line \(1-800-222-1222\)](tel:1-800-222-1222) or your pediatrician after washing off all the chemicals.

If your physician thinks the burn is not too serious, he may show you how to clean and care for it at home using medicated ointments and dressings. Under the following circumstances, however, hospitalization may be necessary:



- If the burns are third degree
- If 10 percent or more of the body is burned
- If the burn involves the face, hands, feet, or genitals, or involves a moving joint
- If the child is very young or fussy, and therefore too difficult to treat at home

When treating a burn at home, watch for any increase in redness or swelling or the development of a bad odor or discharge. These can be signs of infection, which will require medical attention.

## Prevention

- Install smoke detectors in hallways outside bedrooms, the kitchen, living room, and near the furnace, with at least one on every floor of the house. Test them every month to be sure they work. Practice home fire drills. Make sure every family member and others who care for your children know how to leave any area of the home safely in case of a fire.
- Have several working fire extinguishers readily available. Place fire extinguishers around the home where the risk of fire is greatest, such as in the kitchen, furnace room, and near the fireplace.
- Teach your children to crawl to the exits if there's smoke in the room.
- Purchase a safety ladder if your home has a second story, and teach your children how to use it. If you live in a high-rise building, teach your children the locations of all exits and make sure they understand never to use the elevator in a fire. Agree on a family meeting point outside the house or apartment so you can make certain everyone has gotten out of the burning area.
- Teach your children to stop, drop, and roll on the ground if their clothing catches fire.
- Avoid smoking indoors.
- Do not leave food cooking on the stove unattended.
- Lock up flammable liquids in the home. It is best to store them outside the home, out of children's reach, and away from heat or ignition sources.
- Lower the temperature of your water heater to below 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48.9 degrees Celsius) to prevent hot water scalds and burns.
- Don't plug appliances or other electrical equipment into extension cords if they place too much "amperage" or load on the cord, thus creating a potentially unsafe situation.
- Keep matches and lighters away from children, locked and out of reach.
- Avoid all fireworks, even those meant for consumer use.

