



5-minute safety talk

How to Treat a Burn

Burns may be caused by heat, chemicals or electricity. Mild burns may need only simple first aid, but severe burns can constitute a medical emergency.

HEAT BURNS

Heat burns may be caused by flames, steam or any hot object. The severity of a burn depends on the amount of damage to the skin and tissues.

Put out the fire

If the victim's clothing is on fire, have the victim stop, drop and roll. Use water to put out any flames or smother the flames with a blanket.

How bad is the burn?

- **First-degree burns** (superficial burns) damage only the skin's outer layer, like typical sunburn. These minor burns usually heal by themselves.
- **Second-degree burns** (partial-thickness burns) damage the skin's deeper layers. When small, they may not be too serious, but if larger, they may require medical attention.
- **Third-degree burns** (full-thickness burns) damage the skin all the way through and may burn other tissues. These are medical emergencies.

First-degree burns

Characterized by skin that is red, dry and painful. Some swelling may take place, but the skin will not be broken.

Do this first:

1. Stop the burning by removing the heat source.
2. Cool the burned area with cold water. Immerse a small area in a sink or bucket, or cover a larger area with a wet cloth for at least 10 minutes.
3. Remove clothing and jewelry before the area swells.
4. Protect the burn from friction or pressure.

Additional care:

- Aloe vera gel can be used on the skin for comfort. Do not put butter on a burn even though it may relieve pain.

Second-degree burns

Characterized by skin that is swollen, red and possibly blotchy or streaked. This degree of burn is usually accompanied by blisters and significant pain.

Do this first:

1. Follow the first three steps from first-degree burns (see above).

2. Put a loose dressing over the burn. Do not tape it to the skin.

Additional care:

- For large burns or burns on the face, genitals, hands or feet, seek medical attention.
- Do not break skin blisters! Be gentle when covering the area.

Third-degree burns

Characterized by skin damage, charred skin, or white leathery skin. Third degree burns may be accompanied by signs of shock (pale, clammy skin; nausea and vomiting; fast breathing).

Do this first:

1. Stop the burning by removing the heat source.
2. Cool surrounding first- and second-degree burns only.
3. Remove clothing and jewelry before the area swells.
4. Call 9-1-1.
5. Have the victim lie down, elevate legs and maintain body temperature.
6. Carefully cover the burn with a dressing. Do not apply a cream or ointment.

Additional care:

- Watch the victim's breathing and be ready to give basic life support.
- Do not cool more than 20% of the body with water (10% for a child) due to the risk of hypothermia and shock. Do not touch the burn or put anything on it. Do not give the victim anything to drink.

CHEMICAL BURNS

Many strong chemicals can "burn" the skin on contact. Chemical reactions can continue as long as the substance is on the skin, so flush it off with water as soon as possible. Chemical burns are usually diagnosed when a chemical is found on the victim's skin or clothing, when there are complaints of pain or a burning sensation, when a spilled substance is found on or around an unresponsive victim, and when there is a smell of fumes in the air.

Do this first:

1. With a dry chemical, brush it off the victim's skin (wear gloves.)
2. With a spilled liquid giving off fumes, move the victim or ventilate the area.

3. Rapidly flush the area with running water for 30 minutes.
4. Remove clothing and jewelry from the burn area.
5. Call 9-1-1 for any chemical burns.

Additional care:

- If chemicals were spilled in a confined area, evacuate the area.
- Put a dry dressing over the burn.
- Seek medical attention for any chemical burn.

ELECTRICAL BURNS

Electrical burns are diagnosed when a source of electricity is found near the victim, such as bare wires, power cords and electrical devices. Electrical burns are characterized by a burned area of skin at the entrance and exit of the wound and changing levels of responsiveness in the victim.

Electrical burns may include:

- External burns caused by the heat of electricity
- Internal injuries caused by electricity flowing through the body

External burns resulting from heat or flames caused by electricity are cared for the same as heat burns. Look for minor external burns where electricity both entered and left the body. Electricity flowing through the body can stop the victim's heart and cause other serious internal injuries.

Do this first:

1. Do not touch the victim until you know the area is safe. Unplug or turn off the power.
2. With an unresponsive victim, give basic life support and call 9-1-1.
3. Stop the burning, cool the area, remove clothing and jewelry, and cover the burn.
4. Have the victim lie down, elevate legs and maintain body temperature.

Additional care:

- Keep an unresponsive victim in the recovery position and monitor breathing until help arrives.

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