

## **What causes burns?**

You can get burned by heat and fire, radiation, sunlight, electricity or chemicals. There are 3 degrees of burns:

- Thin or superficial burns (also called first-degree burns) are red and painful. They swell a little. They turn white when you press on them. The skin over the burn may peel off in 1 or 2 days.
- Thicker burns, called superficial partial-thickness and deep partial-thickness burns (also called second-degree burns), have blisters and are painful.
- Full-thickness burns (also called third-degree burns) cause damage to all layers of the skin. The burned skin looks white or charred. These burns may cause little or no pain if nerves are damaged.

## **How long does it take for burns to heal?**

- Superficial burns--3 to 6 days.
- Superficial partial-thickness burns--usually less than 3 weeks.
- Deep partial-thickness burns--usually more than 3 weeks.
- Full-thickness burns--without skin grafts, heal only at the edges by scarring. A skin graft is a very thin layer of skin that is cut from an unburned area and put on a badly burned area.

## **How are burns treated?**

The treatment depends on what kind of burn you have. It is not good to put butter, oil, ice or ice water on burns. This might cause more damage to the skin.

### **Superficial burn**

Soak the burn in cool water. Then treat it with a skin care product like aloe vera cream or an antibiotic ointment. To protect the burned area, you can put a dry gauze bandage over the burn. Take acetaminophen (brand name: Tylenol) to help with the pain.

If a first- or second-degree burn covers a large area or is on your face, hands, feet or genitals, you should see a doctor right away.

### **Superficial partial-thickness or deep partial-thickness burn**

Soak the burn in cool water for 15 minutes. If the burned area is small, put cool, clean, wet cloths on the burn for a few minutes every day. Then put on an antibiotic cream or other creams or ointments prescribed by your doctor. Cover the burn with a nonstick dressing (for example, Telfa) and hold the dressing in place with gauze or tape.

Check the burn every day for signs of infection, such as increased pain, redness, swelling or pus. If you see any of these signs, go to your doctor right away. To prevent infection, avoid breaking blisters.

Change the dressing every day. First, wash your hands with soap and water. Then gently wash the burn and put antibiotic ointment on it. If the burn area is small, a dressing may not be needed during the day. Make sure you are up-to-date on tetanus shots (also called vaccines). If you aren't sure, check with your doctor's office.

#### **A note about vaccines**

Sometimes the amount of a certain vaccine cannot keep up with the number of people who need it.

[More info...](#)

Burned skin itches as it heals. Keep your fingernails cut short and don't scratch the burned skin. The burned area will be sensitive to sunlight for up to one year.

#### **Full-thickness burns**

If you get a bad burn, you should see your doctor or go to the hospital right away. Don't take off any clothing that is stuck to the burn. Don't soak the burn in water. Take off other clothing and jewelry near the burn area.

#### **What do I need to know about electrical and chemical burns?**

A person with an electrical burn (for example, from a power line) should go to the hospital right away. Electrical burns often cause serious injury inside the body. This injury may not show on the skin.

A chemical burn should be washed with large amounts of water. Take off any clothing that has the chemical on it. Don't put anything on the burn area. This might start a chemical reaction that could make the burn worse. If you don't know what to do, call your local poison control center or see your doctor right away.

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