



Live Well, Work Well

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BURN AWARENESS

Most burns are only minor injuries. It's common to get them from hot water, a curling iron, touching a hot stove or prolonged exposure to the sun without adequate skin protection. However, some types of burns are very serious and require medical treatment. Here is a guide to help you determine when to seek help for a burn.

Types of Burns

There are several types of burns. The following are some of the most common:

- Thermal: Caused by contact with open flames, steam, hot liquids or surfaces, and other sources of heat.
- Chemical: Caused by contact with household or industrial chemicals.
- Electrical: Caused by contact with electrical sources or lightning.
- Radiation: Caused by the sun, tanning beds, sunlamps or X-rays.

Burn Severity

Burns can range from minor to major. To distinguish the severity, the first step is to determine the degree and the extent of damage to the body's tissue. There are four main classifications for burns:

- First-degree: This is the least serious type of burn and occurs when only the outer layer of skin is burned. It will look red with swelling and pain.
- Second-degree: These are more serious burns that are divided into two subcategories: partial thickness (which injures the first and second layers of skin) and full thickness (which extends to deeper layers). Blisters develop and the skin takes on an intensely reddened, splotchy appearance and produces severe pain and swelling.
- Third-degree: These burns injure all of the skin layers as well as the tissue under the skin. The burned area

can be either black or white and will appear dry. There will be no pain after the initial injury.

- Fourth-degree: While most of the public does not recognize the fourth degree, it is the correct term for burns that go beyond the skin and extend into muscle and bone.

Caring for Burns

Most minor burns will usually heal without intervention within five to 10 days. Apply a cool, wet compress, or immerse in cool, fresh water until pain subsides. Cover the burn with a sterile, non-adhesive bandage or clean cloth. Take over-the-counter pain relievers, if needed.

Blistering will usually be the first warning sign that the burn is more severe than first degree. Discoloration such as redness or whitening of the skin will often appear in the area that was burned, and the burn will be painful. Home treatment of second-degree burns may be possible if the burn covers less than 3 inches of skin.

Immerse in fresh, cool water or apply a cool compress for 15 to 20 minutes. Dry the burn with a clean cloth and cover it with sterile gauze. Do not pop blisters. Due to the delicate nature of such wounds, frequent bandaging is required in order to prevent infection.

If a second-degree burn covers more than 3 inches of the skin, or is located on the hands, feet, buttocks, genitals or face, seek medical attention.

Third- and fourth-degree burns must be treated by medical professionals. First-aid solutions that may be helpful in cases of lesser burns, such as running water over the injured area, may present complications in the case of third- and fourth-degree burns. Cooling large areas of burned skin too quickly can cause hypothermia, as natural defenses are not present to allow the body to return to a normal temperature.

If you know or suspect a burn is more severe than the first degree, seek immediate medical attention.