

**Patient
Information**

Caring for your child's burn

Introduction

This leaflet provides information on how to help care for your child following a less severe burn.

What is a burn?

Burns are one of the most common household injuries, especially among children. The term burn is used to identify severe skin damage. A burn is caused by dry heat, for example, by an iron or fire. A burn caused by something wet, such as hot water or steam is sometimes known as a scald.

Burns can also be caused by contact with chemicals, electricity, friction and the sun.

Burns and scalds are treated in the same way and hospital staff usually refer to them as a burn.

Most people can recover from burns without serious long-term effects but this depends on the cause and degree of injury. Many burns will require immediate emergency medical care and serious burns may take a longer time to recover.

Getting help

For minor burns, keep the burn clean and do not burst any blisters. It is recommended that all children under 5 years are seen by a health professional if they have any burn. A child's skin is thinner than adults and requires prompt treatment to help reduce scarring.

More serious burns require professional medical attention. The amount of pain is not related to how serious the burn is, a very serious burn may be fairly painless.

If the child has breathed in smoke or fumes, you should seek urgent medical attention.

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Types of burn

There are 3 types of burn:

- **Superficial** – only affects the surface of the skin. The skin is red, slightly swollen and very painful. It will usually take 3 to 6 days to heal.
- **Partial thickness** – a deeper burn but it does not affect the whole depth of the skin. The top layer of skin is destroyed and the next layer is also damaged to varying degrees. The skin appears deep red or purple, swollen and blistered. It will usually take 2 to 3 weeks to heal. Specialist advice and treatment may be required from the burns team at Bristol Children's Hospital.
- **Full thickness** – the full depth of the skin is damaged and the skin appears dry and leathery. The skin may be pale or blackened. Your child will be transferred to a specialist burns unit.

Treatment of serious burns

In Gloucestershire all children with one of the following types of burn will be referred to Bristol Children's Burns Unit for assessment:

- **chemical and electrical burns**
- **large or deep burns** – any burn bigger than the injured person's hand
- **burns that cause white or charred skin** – any size
- **burns on the face, hands, arms, feet, legs or genitals that cause blisters**

If your child is referred, into the care of Bristol Children's Hospital or any other regional burns unit, then further wound advice and after care will be explained to you at that unit.

Usually, you will need to contact them for advice if:

- the dressing becomes too loose or falls off
- the dressing becomes too tight
- the dressing becomes wet or fluid from the burn leaks through
- the dressing becomes smelly or looks green

Caring for a child with a less serious burn

Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

After a burn, your child is at risk of developing TSS. This is a rare but life-threatening condition caused by bacteria getting into the body and releasing harmful toxins. Signs and symptoms of TSS are:

- High fever
- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Rash
- Very sleepy
- Off food and drink
- Not passing urine

If your child shows any of these symptoms, please seek urgent medical advice from either the team looking after your child, your GP or NHS 111 as your child may need to be admitted to hospital.

Managing pain

Burns can be very painful and regular pain relief should be given. Paracetamol is usually effective; ibuprofen can also be given. Please ask your pharmacist for further advice on pain relief.

Care of the dressings

A dressing may be applied to the burn to help it heal and reduce the risk of it becoming infected. You will be advised about the dressing used. It is important to keep the dressing clean and dry.

Itching

Itching can be a major problem for some children following treatment for their burns. This is particularly common as the burn begins to heal. It is important that children are discouraged from scratching.

- Wearing loose clothing that is made from natural materials may help improve their comfort.
- Once the wound is healed, regular cream is often required to prevent the area from drying, cracking and becoming sore. Speak to your pharmacist or GP about suitable medicines to help reduce the itch and creams to sooth the skin.

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Diet

Your child will need to drink more because a lot of fluid can be lost from a burnt area. They should also have a protein rich diet as this helps the body to repair quickly.

Protein can be found in meat, fish, cheese, eggs, custard, milk, ice cream and yogurts. Vitamins from fresh fruit and vegetables will help fight any infection.

In the future

After a burn injury your child **must not** be exposed to the sun because their skin will blister and burn more easily. It is highly recommended that you keep your child covered with clothing and use a **sun block** which is regularly reapplied.

After 2 years, protection cream (for both UVA and UVB) should be applied to prevent further skin damage, your pharmacist will be able to advise you on a suitable cream.

Further information

Below is a list of contacts/websites that can provide you with additional support.

Burns Outreach Team

Bristol Children's Hospital

Tel: 0117 342 7920

Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 4:00pm (excluding bank holidays)

Website: www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/your-hospitals/bristol-royal-hospital-for-children/what-we-do/the-south-west-uk-children's-burn-centre/our-network/

Caring for your child after a burn or scald injury

University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust has produced a leaflet giving advice about caring for your child's burn. Please visit <https://foi.avon.nhs.uk/> and type '**caring for a child after a burn**' in the search box. You will then be able to download a copy of the leaflet.

Supporting Children with Burns

www.supportingchildrenwithburns.co.uk

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Childrens Burns Trust

www.cbtrust.org.uk

NHS Choices

Website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/burns-and-scalds/pages/introduction.aspx

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