

First Aid for Burns

Definition of Burns:

Tissue damage caused by fires or prolonged exposure to sunlight or any other kind of radiation, as well as contact with hot surfaces or chemicals.

❖ First-degree burns (minor burns):

First Aid Measures:

Do's (✓):

- Cool the burn wound to alleviate the pain by holding the burned area under cool (not freezing) running water for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Remove any accessories (such as: rings, watches or belts) if any, and remove shoes or clothes quickly and gently before the area swells.
- Cover the burn using a damp sterile bandage or a cool clean cloth, to reduce the risk of infection.
- Take painkillers to relieve the pain if necessary.

Seek medical help immediately if the burns are severe and cover a large area of the body, or if you notice signs of infection such as increased pain, redness and swelling.

Don'ts (X):

- Don't try touching the blister bubbles resulting from the burn.
- Don't apply any ointments or use butter or toothpaste or any other burn remedies.
- Do not put ice directly on the burned area.

❖ Second-degree burns:

First Aid Measures:

Do's (√):

- Protect the burned person from further harm.
- Remove jewelry, belts and other restrictive items, especially from around burned areas like the neck.
- Take painkillers to relieve the pain if necessary.
- Cover the burn using a damp sterile bandage or a cool clean cloth.
- Cover opened blisters with a dry, sterile bandage.

Don'ts (X):

- Don't remove burned clothing stuck to the skin.
- Don't cover the burn with adhesive bandage.
- Avoid placing larger burned areas of the body in cold water as this may cause shock.
- Do not put ice directly on the burned area.
- Don't apply any ointments or use butter or toothpaste or any other burn remedies.
- Avoid touching the blister bubbles resulting from the burn.
- Don't place thin cotton on the burned area as it could irritate the skin.

❖ **Third-degree burns:**

Third-degree burns are considered the most serious of all burns, injuring all the layers of the skin and extending into the fat layer and sometimes the burn can extend to the underlying muscle tissue.

First Aid Measures:

Do's (✓):

Contact the Red Crescent immediately and take the following measures until they arrive:

- Check the patient's vital signs like breathing.
- Protect the burned person from further harm by keeping them away from flammable substances, smoke or sources of heat.
- Elevate the burned area above the patient's heart level, if possible.
- Cover the burn using a damp sterile bandage or a cool clean cloth.

Don'ts (X):

- Don't remove burned clothing stuck to the skin.
- Don't place larger burned areas of the body in cold water as this may cause shock (sudden drop in body temperature).
- Don't cover the burn with adhesive bandage.
- Don't apply any ointments or use butter or toothpaste or any other burn remedies.
- Don't place thin cotton on the burned area as it could irritate the skin.

❖ **After treating the burn at the hospital, the skin requires special care at home; this includes:**

- **Bathing:**

It is acceptable to continue to bathe under the shower in the usual manner; however, it is not advisable to soak in a bathtub. It is also important to test the water temperature before getting into the shower, because the new skin may be highly sensitive to water that is too hot or too cold and may be injured easily. Also, avoid rubbing the skin vigorously. It is essential to adhere to any instructions given to you by your health care provider regarding medication and ways to cover the wound before bathing.

- **Dry Skin:**

Skin dryness results from damage to the fat layer of the skin; this layer will begin to function again, but until that time, you will need to use some lotions and moisturizers. Try to avoid skin moisturizers that contain lanolin and alcohol, as they tend to create blisters in the healed skin.

- **Itchiness:**

Itchiness is a sensation that usually accompanies dry, scaly, and healed skin. It is important to avoid scratching the affected area because this may break the newly formed delicate skin layers. Instead, it is advisable to apply lotions or moisturizers as needed. If you are having a severe problem with itching, your health care provider can prescribe a medication to help relieve this.

- **Bruises:**

Now that the burns have healed, you have a new layer of skin that is thinner and more sensitive and delicate than the rest of your body for a length of time that will vary for each individual. For some it may take several months and for others a year or more. These areas bruise easily and must be protected against burns and sharp objects to avoid bruising. You should also avoid wearing tight clothes or shoes that can cause pressure and blistering, because your body needs time to recover completely and build up skin that can withstand pressure.

- **Blisters:**

Blisters commonly occur during the healing process due to friction, rubbing or bumping against objects and they are no cause for alarm. Some people tend to form blisters more readily than others do. This tendency decreases as the new skin thickens. If blisters occur, it is advisable to ask your health care provider how to care for them.

- **Feeling Cold:**

Because your new skin is thinner, it will be more sensitive to cold temperatures. When the weather is cold, you may experience slight tingling and numbness especially in hands and feet. This sensation will gradually decrease as your skin improves. You can decrease your discomfort by wearing warm clothing and avoiding exposure to the cold for long periods of time. You should protect your skin for at least a year.

- **Exposure to Sunlight:**

Your newly healed skin is more sensitive to sunlight and may be prone to sunburn more severely after short periods of time. For this reason, it is advisable to protect the affected area by covering it with thin clothing. You can also wear a big hat if the burn is on the face or neck.

It is important to always apply sunscreen on the affected area especially during summer.

This should be done consistently for at least a year, after that you can start to test your skin's sensitivity to sunlight.

- **Skin Appearance:**

Some scars and changes in the appearance of the skin are to be expected during the recovery period.

- **Skin Discoloration:**

The skin discoloration you see in your healed skin is a result of the normal healing process. It may appear pink, brown, or a grayish color, and this is no cause for alarm. Discoloration varies with each individual, depending on your natural skin coloring. Natural color may return to second-degree burns within several months. Third-degree burns, on the other hand, may take much longer and some discoloration may even be permanent in burns of greater depth.

- **Discoloration of extremities:**

If the burn is near the arms or legs, you may notice some discoloration after walking or moving your arms. You can help relieve this problem in your legs by sitting with your feet up on a chair. You may find that you experience less discomfort if you walk rather than stand in one place. Standing still for long periods of time allows the blood to pool in your feet and legs causing swelling and discoloration. Exercising in moderation will also improve your circulation. If you continue to have this problem, you should inform your health care provider on your next visit.

- **Scarring:**

Discoloration is generally associated with scarring. Initially it is very difficult to tell how much scarring will be permanent. Some people have a greater tendency to scar. Scarring varies from person to person and with different depths of injury. Scarring from first-degree burns and light second-degree burns may disappear within a few months. However, Deep second-degree and third-degree burns may take at least two years. Scars usually progress over a period of time. You can expect them to look the worst between 4 and 8 months post-burn and then they gradually improve over time.

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