

Patient Information

Caring for a burn

This leaflet has been written to help you look after you or your child's burn injury.

You/Your child's burn has been assessed in the Emergency Department. It may have been covered with a dressing which needs to be kept clean and dry. We normally advise to cover the affected area with a plastic bag while washing or bathing and to keep the affected area out of the water as much as possible.

Initially the dressing will need to be changed every two to three days. This interval time may be extended as the burn heals. You will normally be given an appointment for this, either at the Emergency Department Review Clinic or an Investigation and Treatment Room at a facility local to your home. If you live out of the area you may be asked to make an appointment with the nurse at your GP surgery.

The dressing change can sometimes cause some discomfort so you or your child may wish to take some pain relief medication (such as paracetamol) around 30 mins prior to this review.

The dressing should also be changed if it accidentally becomes wet, begins to fall off, or if fluid seeps through from your burn. The dressing will need to be worn until the wound is healed well enough for it to be left uncovered. The doctor or nurse you see in the clinic or surgery will be able to give you advice on this.

Pain - If the burn is painful, regular over the counter painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can be taken.

If the burn is to an arm or leg it may be helpful to raise the limb to relieve discomfort and reduce any swelling.

Signs to look out for -

Occasionally burns can become infected. The signs of this happening are:

Worsening pain

A smelly discharge from the wound

Spreading redness, swelling and warmth around the burn

Seek medical attention if you think your burn has become infected. An infected burn can normally be treated with antibiotics and painkilling medication if necessary.

In **rare** cases, an infected burn can cause blood poisoning (sepsis) or toxic shock syndrome. These serious conditions can be life threatening.

Signs of sepsis and toxic shock syndrome include:

A high temperature (greater than 38 degrees)

Feeling generally unwell with flu-like symptoms such as headache, sore throat, cough and aching muscles

Feeling sick or vomiting

Diarrhoea

Feeling faint or dizzy

A widespread flat red skin rash

It is particularly important to look out for these symptoms in young children and babies who are being treated for burns as toxic shock syndrome is more common in this age group.

Should you or your child develop any of these symptoms seek help immediately from your local Emergency Department, GP or NHS 24.

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Healing and Recovery - Burns can take up to three weeks to heal depending on the severity. When the wound has healed and the dressing removed you will need to carry out the following care regime to help improve the final appearance of the skin and to reduce the possibility of raised scars developing.

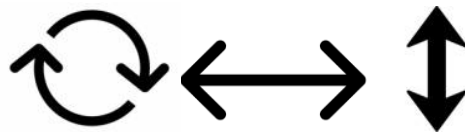
The following care should be carried out 3-4 times daily –

Wash the skin with tap water and a mild soap. You or your child can have a bath when the wounds have almost healed.



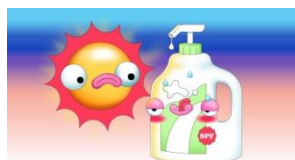
Moisturise the skin with simple plain non-perfumed moisturiser ie Diprobase, Zerobase, E45 etc. until there is no cream visible on the skin. Avoid perfumed creams as these are likely to irritate the skin.

Massage the skin whilst moisturising using small circular motions applying pressure with your fingertips. Finish the massage by stroking the skin in a downward and horizontal motion. This helps to break down the collagen associated with scarring.



Itch - Itching following a burn is common and can be made more bearable by moisturising. Anti-histamine medication can often help as can sleeping in a cool bedroom overnight.

Care in the sun - Healed skin is very sensitive to sunlight. The healed skin should be covered by clothing at all times and a high factor sun cream should be worn. If the face or hands are affected then use a total sun block and wear a hat to protect the face. The healed skin should have no sun exposure for 9 months and then you should continue to be very careful for a period of 2 years. A UV suit may be useful for children playing/swimming outdoors during the summer months.



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