

"My Burn Wound"

Information on how to care for you or your loved one's burns



What is a burn?

A burn is a skin injury that happens because of:

- Heat
- Friction
- Chemicals
- Sunlight
- Electricity
- Radiation

Scalds from boiling liquids and its steam, building fires, and flammable liquids are the most common causes of burns.

How are burns classified?

- **Superficial:** these burns only affect the top layer of skin. They look red and dry without blisters and are painful. These burns heal in 5-10 days
- **Superficial-Partial Thickness:** these burns affect the first layer of skin and the top of the second layer of skin. They look red and moist with clear blisters and are painful. These burns usually heal in 2-3 weeks
- **Partial-Thickness:** these burns affect the entire first and second layers of skin. They look yellow and/or white and dry and are less painful. These burns usually heal in 3-8 weeks. These burns may have blisters, and can result in scarring and contractures
- **Full-Thickness:** these burns affect all three layers of skin. They look leathery and white/brown and are painless. Recovery may take many months and can result in scars, contractures, and amputations
- **Fourth Degree:** these burns affect all three layers of skin and fat, muscle, and/or bone. They look black and dry and need to have their dead tissue removed. These burns may result in amputation and/or death

How will my burn be treated?

Superficial wounds usually do not need treatment (i.e. sunburn without blisters) other than protection of the area from further damage and pain control. Superficial-partial thickness burns do need treatment:

- As burns are prone to tetanus, you may need tetanus shot if you have not had one in the past 10 years
- If you have a chemical burn, your doctor will clean the burn to remove any leftover chemical
- Your doctor will clean your burns, remove any dead tissue, and put on a non-stick dressing. Some doctors like to use dressings that help minimize bacteria but there is little research that says these work better than basic non-stick dressing
- Your burn may be painful and/or itchy – your primary care provider can advise you on appropriate medications

Blisters – to break or not to break?

- Leave small, clear, fluid filled blisters alone. These blisters are considered "nature's Band-Aid" as they keep infection out and keep the wound moist and warm. The body will usually re-absorb the fluid
- If blisters are in a spot that keeps you from moving your joints or are large see your primary care provider to have the blisters safely broken.

What can you do?

- **Keep your dressing clean and dry**
- **Change your dressing as instructed**
- **Contact your health care provider if you have sudden increased pain, spreading redness, fever, or feel like you have the flu**