

Initial First Aid Treatment for Minor Burns

Think of the skin as a coat of armor for the human body. When a burn injury occurs, it causes a break in the skin and may subsequently cause an infection if it is not treated appropriately or the right away. Frequently the question is asked, "How do I treat a minor burn?"

The American Burn Association's Burn Prevention Committee recommends the following guidelines for the treatment of minor burns. Please note that even a small burn, may have the potential to become infected. It is always advisable to seek medical attention **as soon as possible**. Remember, when in doubt or if you think the individual's life is in danger, call 911. Remember, if you call 911 using a cell phone you may or may not get the local 911 for the area you may be in. Remain calm and provide the operator with the necessary information to get the EMS personnel to you.

Burns are primarily divided into three categories: first-degree or superficial burns, second-degree, or partial thickness burns and third-degree or full thickness burns. How these types of burns are treated initially will determine whether there is a successful outcome.

First-Degree Burn – are burns which involve the outer most layer of skin and are usually associated with a sun burn. Such an injury may occur from too much exposure to the sun (gardening, sunbathing, etc.). The skin is usually still intact, but may appear to be red, very warm or hot to touch and painful. There may also be small blisters, and swelling in and around the area of injury. Initial first-aid treatment for a first-degree burn include the following:

DO's

- Stop the burning process: **cool the burn with running cool (not cold) water for at least 5 minutes**. But do not use ice, as this may cause further skin damage. Do not over cool! If the victim starts to shiver, stop the cooling process.
- Remove all jewelry, watches, rings and clothing around the burned area as soon as possible.
- Administer an over-the-counter pain reliever such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen for pain control. Follow the directions on the label. Consult a physician or health care provider if pain is not relieved.
- Cover the burn with a sterile gauze bandage or clean cloth. Wrap the burned area loosely to avoid putting too much pressure on the burn tissue.
- Minor burns will usually heal without further treatment.
- For small area burns, apply soothing lotions that contains aloe vera to the burned area to help relieve the pain and discomfort.
- Seek medical attention if there is a persistent fever not relieved by medication or redness that may extend beyond the border of the burn or pain is not controlled by ibuprofen or acetaminophen.
- Drink plenty of fluids (electrolyte containing solutions such as gator aid) if the person appears to be dehydrated.

DON'TS

- Do not apply ice – this may cause further damage to the skin.
- Do not use any butter, ointments or other home remedies on the burn. Such substances may trap the heat in the tissue and makes the burn worse.
- Do not break any blisters...leave intact.
- Do not delay seeing medical attention if the burn is larger than the size of the victim's palm.

Second-Degree Burn - occurs when the second layer of skin (dermis) is burned. This burn usually has the following characteristics: very red, blister formation, extremely painful and a fair amount of swelling. In general, if a second degree burn is smaller than 2-3 inches (7 centimeters) it may be treated as a minor burn. If the area burned is larger than this, or involves functional parts of the body such as feet, face, eye, ears, groin or located over major joints, more in-depth medical attention is needed. Take the person to the nearest emergency room, family doctor or minor emergency clinic to have the burn evaluated. Failure to do so may result in permanent disfigurement or loss of function.

Third-Degree Burn – are **NOT** minor burns and should be evaluated and treated by a healthcare provider. A third-degree burn is a very serious burn, no matter what the size or area of the body that may be involved. A third-degree burn involves all layers of the skin and can cause permanent tissue damage. The skin may appear to be charred, blackened, or white. The skin texture may be very dry or leathery. All third-degree burns should be evaluated by a healthcare provider immediately.

Healing – it may take several days for a mild first-degree or second-degree burn to heal. During that time, it is important that the affected area is observed for infection, such as redness extending beyond the burned area, changes in the appearance of the wound or slight fever not relieved by Tylenol. As your skin begins to heal, you may also notice that it will itch, which can be very uncomfortable at times. This is normal and will eventually decrease. Frequent application of lotion can help keep the skin hydrated and minimize the itching process. If the itching is too severe, an over-the-counter medication such as Benadryl® may be helpful in easing the discomfort. Remember...always follow the directions on the label. The wound should be kept clean with daily dressing changes. If you have any concern or questions, consult your healthcare provider. Once the burn has healed, limit the exposure of the burn skin to direct sunlight. Always wear sun protection.

Following the above guidelines should promote healing to most minor burns.

It is important to note that the consumer should always seek the advice of a healthcare provider if there is any question regarding the healing process of a minor burn. The American Burn Association and the Burn Prevention Committee are not responsible or liable for any untoward complications suffered by any individual following these suggested guidelines.

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