

BURNS

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

3.4

DESCRIPTION

Injury to the skin, and sometimes other organs, from contact with heat, radiation, electricity or chemicals. The risk of damage is greatest with infants and young children.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Burns are of 3 types:

- 1st-degree burns are limited to the upper skin layer. They produce redness, tenderness, pain, swelling and slight fever.
- 2nd-degree burns affect deeper skin layers. Symptoms are more severe and usually include blisters.
- 3rd-degree burns involve all skin layers. Skin is white (appears cooked), and there may be no pain in the initial stages.

CAUSES

Heat sources, such as fire, steam or electricity. Open flame and hot liquid are most common causes. Tissue injury caused by chemicals or radiation, including sunlight. Lightning strikes can cause internal burns with minimal external signs.

RISK INCREASES WITH

Carelessness
Smoking in bed

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Wear sun-screen lotions outdoors. Fireproof your home. Install smoke alarms, plan emergency exits and have regular fire drills. Wear protective gear and observe safety precautions around heat or radiation. Don't touch uncovered electric wires. Teach children safety rules for matches, fires, electrical outlets, cords and stoves. Discard extension cords with a pronged plug on one end and a bulb socket on the other. These are hazardous. If you have small children, put safety caps on unused outlets. Discard frayed cords.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Most persons recover if the extent of burns (including 3rd-degree burns) is limited to 50% of the body surface. For less-severe burns, skin usually repairs itself in 1 to 3 weeks.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Infection at the burn site.
- Pneumonia.

- Shock due to loss of fluids and electrolytes (severe burns).
- Permanent scars.
- Vision impairment, if eyes are injured.
- Tetanus and other infections.

GENERAL MEASURES

Therapy will be dependent on depth of burns and total body surface area affected. For less-severe burns apply cool water compresses, then you may apply non-prescription aloe vera gel or lotion to cool 1st degree burns. Seek medical care for 3rd degree burns and 2nd degree burns on face, hand or genital, or if burns cover a large surface area. Immerse small 2nd or 3rd degree burn areas in cold water for 10 minutes to reduce pain and swelling. Keep the burn area clean. Do not break blisters. Soak in a tub or use lukewarm compresses once a day. You may soak in a tub to help soak off crusting areas. Use plain water for compresses. Prop the burn area higher than the rest of the body, if possible. You may use dressings on the burn. Hospitalization for all large 3rd degree burns and some 2nd degree burns. Special burn centers exist for the worst cases. Surgery to graft skin over 3rd degree burns.

MEDICATION

To treat 1st degree burns, you may use non-prescription antibiotic ointments or aloe vera gel. To treat severe burns, pain relievers, antibiotics and tetanus booster shots may be required.

ACTIVITY & DIET

Depends on location and extent of the burn. No special diet for minor burns. Increase intake of non-alcoholic fluids.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

No healing in 6 days; chills and fever; increased pain, redness, swelling, foul odor or pus in the burn area.

Student Health Center



WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.