

Burn Treatment & Prevention Tips for Families

Burns are a common injury among children. They can be caused by sunburn ([/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Sun-Safety.aspx](#)), hot water or other hot liquids, fire, electrical contact and chemicals. All of these can cause permanent injury and scarring ([/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Treating-Cuts.aspx](#)) to the skin.

Read on to learn what to do if your child is burned, and ways to help prevent these injuries.



Immediate treatment steps for burns

- 1. As quickly as possible, soak the burn in cool water.** Don't hesitate to run cool water over the burn long enough to cool the area and relieve the pain immediately after the injury.
- 2. Cool any smoldering clothing immediately by soaking with water, then remove any clothing from the burned area** unless it is stuck firmly to the skin. In that case, cut away as much clothing as possible.
- 3. If the injured area is not oozing, cover the burn with a sterile gauze pad or a clean, dry cloth.**
- 4. If the burn is oozing, cover it lightly with sterile gauze if available and immediately seek medical attention.** If sterile gauze is not available, cover burns with a clean sheet or towel.

What not to do for a burn

- Do not use ice on a burn. It may delay healing.
- Do not rub a burn; it can increase blistering.
- Do not put butter, grease, mustard or powder on a burn.

All of these so-called home remedies actually can make the injury worse.

When to call the pediatrician

For anything more serious than a superficial burn, or if redness and pain continue for more than a few hours, contact your pediatrician. All electrical burns and burns of the hands, mouth, or genitals should get immediate medical attention. Chemicals that cause burns also may be absorbed through the skin and cause other symptoms. Call the Poison Help Line (1-800-222-1222) or your pediatrician after washing off all the chemicals.

If your pediatrician thinks the burn is not too serious, they may show you how to clean and care for it at home using medicated ointments and dressings. When treating a burn at home, watch for any increase in redness or swelling or the development of a bad odor or discharge. These can be signs of infection, which will require medical attention. See *First Aid for Burns: Parent FAQs* ([/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/First-Aid-For-Burns.aspx](#)) for more information

In some cases, hospitalization may be needed:

- If the burns are third degree (</English/tips-tools/symptom-checker/Pages/symptomviewer.aspx?symptom=Burn>).
- If 10% or more of the body is burned.
- If the burn involves the face, hands, feet or genitals, involves a moving joint, or goes completely around part of the body.
- If the child is very young or fussy, and therefore too difficult to treat at home.

10 tips to protect children from scalds & burns

- 1. Avoid carrying your baby and hot liquids** like coffee, tea or soup at the same time. And don't hold or cradle your baby near hot liquids on the stove or tabletops. Even a small splash could scald your baby.
- 2. Protect your child from tap water scalds.** Adjust your water heater so the hottest temperature at the faucet is no more than 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48.9 degrees Celsius) to prevent scald burns. See *5 Bathroom Safety Tips for Infants & Young Children* (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Bathroom-Safety.aspx>).
- 3. Make sure young children cannot reach the microwave** (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Microwave-Safety.aspx>). Also, stir microwaved food well or let it stand for two minutes so the heat can distribute evenly.
- 4. Do not leave food cooking on the stove** (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Kitchen-Safety.aspx>) **unattended.** Place fire extinguishers in the kitchen and elsewhere around the home where the risk of fire is greatest, such as the furnace room and near the fireplace.
- 5. Fireplaces, woodstoves, and kerosene heaters should be screened** so your child can't get near them. Gas fireplaces with glass doors get extremely hot, stay hot long after the fireplace is turned off, and can cause severe burns when touched. Check electric baseboard heaters, radiators, and even vents from hot-air furnaces to see how hot they get when the heat is on. They may need to be screened, too.
- 6. Do not have lit candles** in areas that are easily reachable by a child. Store matches, cigarette lighters and candles out of your child's reach. Also avoid smoking indoors, and never allow anyone to smoke near your baby.
- 7. Practice home fire safety.** Install smoke detectors in hallways outside bedrooms, the kitchen, living room, and near the furnace, for example, with at least one on every floor of the house. Practice family fire drills. Teach your children to stop, drop, and roll on the ground if their clothing catches fire. For more information, see *Home Fire Safety for Families* (</English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Fire-Safety.aspx>).
- 8. Lock up flammable liquids** in the home. It is best to store them outside the home, out of children's reach, and away from heat or ignition sources.
- 9. Avoid using fireworks** (</English/news/Pages/Stay-Safe-this-4th-of-July.aspx>), even those meant for consumer use. The tip of a sparkler can burn at up to 1800 degrees Fahrenheit!
- 10. Protect your child's skin from too much sun** (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Sun-Safety.aspx>). Try to limit your sun exposure between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm when UV rays are strongest. Wear protective clothing and sunscreen. See *Sun Safety: Sunburn & Sunscreen Information for Parents* (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Sun-Safety.aspx>). On hot, sunny days, also protect kids from hot surfaces such as playground (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Safety-on-the-Playground.aspx>) slides and dark pavement.

More information

- Microwave Safety Tips to Prevent Burns (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Microwave-Safety.aspx>)
- First Aid Guide for Parents & Caregivers (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/First-Aid-Guide.aspx>)
- Holiday Fire Safety (</English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Holiday-Fire-Safety.aspx>)

- Cuts, Scrapes & Scar Management: Parent FAQs (</English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Treating-Cuts.aspx>)[Back to Top](#)

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The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.