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Burns

Burns are extremely common as our skin is very sensitive and is made of three main layers: the epidermis, the dermis and subcutaneous tissue. Any excessive heat (from the sun, hot liquids, flames, hot objects touching the skin, electricity or chemicals) will cause damage and possible burning. Children and the elderly are prone to serious forms of burning.

What to look for...

Types of Burns

- Minor burns include first-degree burns, some second-degree burns, and sunburns. First-degree burns affect the top layer of skin - the epidermis. These burns are normally less serious and heal quickly with the skin peeling away after about two days. Second-degree burns also affect the epidermis but go deeper into some of the dermis layer. These types of burns will also heal reasonably quickly unless they cover a large area or become infected. (Infection should not occur when the burn is being professionally treated).
- Major burns include larger areas of second-degree burns and all third and fourth degree burns. These are serious irrespective of any other factor. With these types of burns, all three layers of skin are affected. When these types of burns occur, the affected location may look white, blackened or charred.
- Electrical burns are common and may appear ok on the outside. However, sometimes there can be extensive results inside the body.

Symptoms to watch for:

- If the area is red, tender, maybe swollen and blistering, it is more than likely a first-degree burn
- If the area is red, painful and blistering, it is probably a second-degree burn
- If the pain in the area is severe, the burned skin looks white or charred and blood vessels are exposed, or alternatively there is no pain (because of subsequent nerve damage), it is probably a third-degree burn.
- If the area has all the above symptoms plus bone or muscle is showing, it is a fourth-degree burn.

Traditional Treatment

All types of burns need immediate medical treatment.

If your burns are minor, you should apply first-aid treatment. If you are experiencing any more pain, over the counter pain killers may be of assistance to you. If your burn requires medical treatment, see your doctor immediately. Your doctor may simply prescribe analgesics for pain, or if an infection is evident, will prescribe some form of antibiotic. If you have blisters, leave them alone - do not break them as this can cause infections.

Do not apply butter to burns

Prevention

Sunburn - wear protective clothing, sunblocks and stay out of the sun during the 11am to 2pm time slot. Also ensure that children and the elderly are adequately protected at all times as their skin is particularly susceptible.

Flame burns - always have a fire extinguisher in the home (the kitchen preferably). Install smoke detectors and have them checked at least once per year.

Scalds (hot liquid burns) - ensure all pots/pan handles are out of the reach of children when hot. The kitchen and bathroom are danger zones to consider. Never leave a child alone in these areas. The main thing to remember with scalds is to always be careful with hot liquids. Always watch when pouring them.

Electrical burns - get your power points, electrical goods etc checked regularly by electricians and keep children away from outlets. Always switch off electrical appliances at the power point and unplug them after use.

Chemical burns - store chemicals and cleaning products in locked cupboards in the house. Have these bottles clearly marked as dangerous. Keep away from children or the visually impaired. Buy cleaning products with child resistant lids for safety.

When to Seek Further Professional Advice

- You notice any of the symptoms listed above.