

Health Tips

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with

Dr. D


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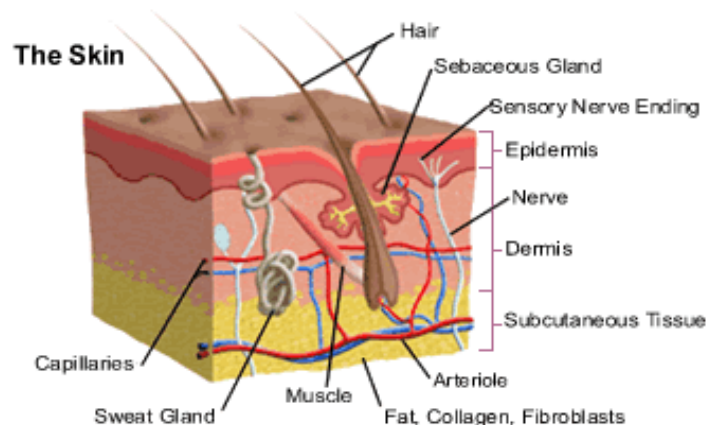
Health Tip: First Aid for Burns

As a child, the first thing that my mother would do for a minor burn was to apply butter to the area. Of course this is now known to be counterproductive, but she was just doing what she thought was best. To determine the best course of action for burns, it is important to be able to distinguish a minor burn from a serious one. Burns are classified as first, second and third degree, depending on the depth and severity of the burn. Once this is established, the most appropriate treatment can be provided.

A **first degree burn** is the least serious and involves the outer layer (epidermis) of the skin. Inflammation caused by the burn is characterized by pain, redness, and a mild amount of swelling. Sunburn is an example of a first-degree burn.

Second degree burns are deeper. In addition to the pain, redness and

inflammation, blistering is usually present with a burn of this severity. **Third degree burns** involve all layers of the skin, in effect killing that area of skin. Because the nerves and blood vessels are damaged, third degree burns appear white and tend to be relatively



painless.

Treating minor burns: Self-care is appropriate for most first degree burns and second-degree burns that are smaller than 2 or 3 inches across. Larger burns or those that involve a substantial portion of the hands, feet, face, or skin over a major joint should receive the attention of a doctor. Electrical burns also require medical evaluation. These often cause serious injury inside the body that is not evident on the skin. No matter how insignificant the injury appears, electrical burns should be evaluated in an emergency department.

Self-treatment of minor burns is as follows:

- Run cool (not cold) water over the burned area or hold a clean, cold

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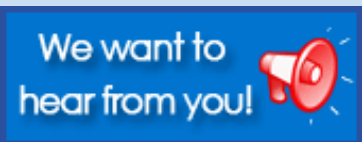
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compress on the burn for several minutes.

- Rings, bracelets, and other potentially constricting articles should be removed since swelling developing later can make them difficult to remove.
- The burn may be dressed with an antibiotic ointment like Neosporin or with topical aloe gel.
- Cover the burn with a sterile gauze bandage. A non-stick dressing applied directly onto the burn, such as Telfa, is usually best. Wrap the gauze loosely to avoid putting pressure on burned skin.
- An over-the-counter pain reliever such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others), naproxen (Aleve) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) will help with discomfort.
- If not up-to-date, a tetanus "booster" should be received.



Minor burns usually heal within a few days to a couple of weeks. The dressing should be changed daily and the wound checked for signs of infection such as increased pain, redness, swelling or pus. Blisters should be left intact to prevent infection from developing. If you see any signs of infection, seek medical attention right away.

Third degree or extensive second degree burns require emergency medical assistance. Until emergency medical care is available follow these steps:

1. Don't remove burnt clothing. However, do make sure the victim is no longer in contact with smoldering materials or exposed to smoke or heat.
2. Check for signs of circulation (breathing, coughing or movement). If there is no breathing or other sign of circulation, begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
3. Cover the area of the burn. Use a cool, moist, sterile bandage; clean, moist cloth; or moist towels.

Important **don'ts** related to treatment of minor burns:

- Don't use ice. Putting ice directly on a burn can cause frostbite.
- Don't apply butter or ointments to the burn. This could worsen the severity of the burn.
- Don't break blisters. Broken blisters can allow the skin to become infected.



Remember that only the outer layer of skin has the ability to regenerate itself. Deep second or third degree burns may cause permanent injury and scarring. Should burns of this severity involve the hands, feet or joints, this scarring can cause

permanent impairment of function. If there is concern that the burn is deeper than the outer layer of skin, seek medical care.

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