

FAQ: Burns

How many burn injuries occur each year in the United States?

Each year there are over 1 million burn injuries.

<http://www.ameriburn.org>

What are the most common causes of burn injuries?

Burn injuries are caused through contact with hot objects, scalds (from steam, hot liquids or hot water), fire and flame, chemicals, and electrical sources.

<http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files/PDF/OS.BurnsByAge.pdf>

What medical terms are used to describe burns and what do they mean?

There are three levels of burns

- First degree burns affect only the outer layer of the skin. They cause pain, redness, and swelling.
- Second-degree (partial thickness) burns affect both the outer layer and underlying layer of skin. They cause pain, redness, swelling and blistering.
- Third degree (full thickness) burns extend into deeper tissues. They become white or blackened, charred skin that may be numb. Third degree burns require skin grafts.

How do most burn injuries occur?

Many things can cause a severe burn injury:

Fire

The heat from a fire can sear your skin within seconds. The heat from a fire will cause inhalation injuries or burns to the airway and lungs. Most fatalities in a fire occur from the smoke rather than the heat.

Cooking

Loose clothing can catch fire and cause burn injury so be careful while cooking. This is where “stop, drop, and roll” is effective, if your clothing should catch fire. Grease splattered from a frying pan can cause burn injuries. Never try to move a pan with a grease fire because it is so easy to spill the burning grease and start a bigger fire. NEVER put water on a grease fire because this will cause the burning grease to explode, spreading the fire and possibly setting you on fire. Scald burn injuries can happen when a person is using a microwave. The food or liquid heated in a microwave is extremely hot, resulting in burns from spills, splashes, and steam. Use caution when removing lids from hot foods; remember that steam may have accumulated. Lift the cover or lid away from your face and arm. Steam can reach temperatures over 200 degrees. Puncture plastic wrap or use vented containers to allow steam to escape while cooking. Wait at least one minute before removing the cover. When removing covers, keep the steam away from your face or arm.

Sunburn

Sunburn, a type of second degree burn to the skin, occurs when the skin is overexposed to the sun’s harmful ultra violet or “UV” rays. These UV Rays can penetrate thin clouds, haze, and fog. Avoid long sun exposure, even with sunscreen, and especially during the middle of the day. Use a sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15.

Fireworks

Approximately 10,000 people suffer burn injuries each year from fireworks. These injuries are the result of improper use of sparklers and illegal fireworks. Sparklers can reach temperatures as high as 3000°F. Sparklers account for the largest number of fireworks injuries each year.

<http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files/PDF/fireworksfactsheet.pdf>

How quickly can my skin burn if I come into contact with a hot object?

A 124°F a third degree burn will occur in just 3 minutes. It takes just 5 seconds for a third degree burn to occur at 140°F.

Why should I be concerned about getting a burn injury?

Burn injuries affect a person physically, emotionally, and financially. Severely burned skin has to be removed in a painful process and replaced with your own skin or skin from another source. Your physical appearance will be permanently changed. The average hospital stay is six days for a burn injury. A hospital stay can cost up to thousands of dollars per day. Depending on the type of burn there may be multiple surgeries to repair the skin. The affected body part may never fully function again.