

Burns and Scalds

Minor Injury Unit



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Burns and scalds are damage to the skin caused by heat. Both are treated in the same way. A burn is caused by dry heat – by an iron or fire. A scald is caused by something wet, such as hot water or steam.

Burns can be very painful and may cause:

- red or peeling skin
- [blisters](#)
- swelling
- white or charred skin

The amount of pain you feel isn't always related to how serious the burn is. Even a very serious burn may be relatively painless.

Treating burns and scalds

To treat a burn, follow the [first aid](#) advice below:

- immediately get the person away from the heat source to stop the burning
- cool the burn with cool or lukewarm running water for 20 minutes – do not use ice, iced water, or any creams or greasy substances like butter
- remove any clothing or jewellery that's near the burnt area of skin, including babies' nappies, but do not move anything that's stuck to the skin
- make sure the person keeps warm by using a blanket, for example, but take care not to rub it against the burnt area
- cover the burn by placing a layer of cling film over it – a clean plastic bag could also be used for burns on your hand
- use painkillers such as [Paracetamol](#) or [Ibuprofen](#) to treat any pain
- if the face or eyes are burnt, sit up as much as possible, rather than lying down – this helps to reduce swelling
- if it's an [acid or chemical burn](#), dial 999, carefully try to remove the chemical and any contaminated clothing, and rinse the affected area using as much clean water as possible

Read more about [treating burns and scalds](#).



When to get medical attention

Depending on how serious a burn is, it may be possible to treat it at home. For minor burns, keep the burn clean and do not burst any blisters that form. More serious burns require professional medical attention. You should go to a hospital A&E department for:

- all chemical and electrical burns
- large or deep burns – any burn bigger than the injured person's hand
- burns that cause white or charred skin – any size
- burns on the face, hands, arms, feet, legs or genitals that cause blisters

If someone has breathed in smoke or fumes, they should also seek medical attention. Some symptoms may be delayed and can include:

- coughing
- a sore throat
- difficulty breathing
- facial burns

People at greater risk from the effects of burns, such as children under 5 years old and pregnant women, should also get medical attention after a burn or scald.

The size and depth of the burn will be assessed and the affected area cleaned before a dressing is applied. In severe cases, skin graft surgery may be recommended.

Read more about:

- [recovering from burns and scalds](#)
- [complications of burns and scalds](#)

Read more about burns and scalds www.nhs.uk/conditons/burns-and-scalds/

If you need further advice you can telephone 111 for immediate advice.

Contact us [if not included elsewhere]

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