



Information for patients, relatives and carers

Burns and Scalds

Most minor burns/scalds heal without complications. A burn is caused by dry heat (for example an iron or fire) and a scald is caused by wet heat (for example hot water or steam). This leaflet contains general advice and information for the care of burns and scalds.

Infection

Even if a burn/scald is thoroughly cleaned and dressed there is still the possibility it may become infected (the risk of infection increases with the size of the wound). Please seek further medical advice from your GP or call NHS111 if you develop a temperature of 38C or higher, or if the burn/scald or surrounding area becomes:

- Red
- Hot
- Swollen
- Increasingly painful
- Develops a discharge and/or foul smell
- Doesn't appear to be healing

Blisters

If your burn has blistered it is normal for the attending staff to remove, de-roof any blisters larger than 6mm. This allows observation of the wound bed - accurate assessment of the burn depth. The removal of blister fluid and non viable tissue helps reduce risk of infection and improves the efficacy of wound dressings.

Scar tissue

Scar tissue formation is a natural healing process of your body. If your burn/scald has healed on its own within around 10 to 14 days then scarring will be minimal, usually fading away significantly over the next few months to years.

If your burn/scald has taken longer than this to heal then you may find that the new skin acts differently. Instead of staying soft and flat it may become raised and lumpy. In this situation you may benefit from specific scar treatment aimed at assisting the scar to pale, soften and flatten quicker. Whilst these scars will never vanish, they will certainly fade over time as they mature.

Applying an emollient, such as aqueous cream or emulsifying ointment, two or three times a day can help, as can using sunscreen with a high sun protection factor (SPF) to protect the healing area from the sun when you're outside

If you have any persistent problems with scarring please speak to your GP. They can refer you to specialist for further advice.

Washing and moisturising

Once your burn/scald has healed, it is important that you wash and moisturise it regularly.

Your new skin may not be producing its own natural oils as it did before your injury. To keep your healed skin soft and supple it may be necessary to replace these oils in the form of a cream.

Moisturising may also reduce itchiness, and the massaging action that you use to rub the cream in may also help keep your scar tissue soft and flat.

Use any non-scented oily cream/lotion and make sure that you always wash off the old cream before applying new. This way you will avoid your skin becoming too greasy and forming spots and blackheads.

Try and get into a routine of moisturising two to three times a day for several months to come.

Itching

Itching is caused by the natural healing processes of the body and whilst some patients are not troubled by itching at all, others find that it can develop into a major problem.

To reduce itching try these methods until you find one that suits you best:

- Wear cotton clothing and use cotton bedding.
- Wash and cream your healed skin regularly.
- Have a soak in the bath and apply moisturising cream immediately after.
- Try not to scratch; instead try gently massaging or patting the affected area.
- Try and keep your body temperature the same. Avoid extremes of hot or cold.
- If itching becomes troublesome, discuss with your local pharmacist.

Alternatively your GP may prescribe some anti-itching (antihistamine) medication.

Physiotherapy and exercise

If the skin over or near a joint has been damaged by a burn/scald, then it could become tight and eventually contract if it is not exercised regularly.

Scar contractures may lead to a lack of movement and this will limit your everyday activities.

It is always better to prevent a contracture occurring than it is to treat it, but sometimes they form despite your best efforts.

If you think that you have a problem, then make sure the person responsible for your care is aware; they may arrange some physiotherapy for you if you are not already receiving it.

Holidays and sunshine

Generally, it's better to wait until your skin has healed prior to taking a holiday.

Try to bear in mind that for the first two years after your injury, the healed skin will burn very easily and particularly if you are going abroad, you must protect it with strong sun block cream (SPF 50). Where possible stay covered by cotton clothing, wear a peaked cap or wide-brimmed hat when you are out in the sun.

Swimming pools and seawater will not hurt your skin but don't forget that you burn more quickly in the water than on land.

① If you have further concerns about your condition, please contact your GP. If you are not sure what to do, call 111 or get help from 111 online: [https://111.nhs.uk/ When to use NHS 111 - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://111.nhs.uk/When-to-use-NHS-111-NHS-www.nhs.uk)

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print, Easy Read or audio, please ask the staff who are looking after you.

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