

Burns and scalds



Around 2.7 million people a year in the UK go to hospital after a home accident. Burns, scalds and stings are some of the most common causes.

The term 'burn' is used to describe an injury that occurs from direct contact with heat or flame. 'Scalds' are caused by liquid or steam.

When treating a burn or a scald, the aim is to cool the area as quickly as possible to relieve the pain and reduce swelling.

How to treat a burn

The most effective way of treating a burn or scald is to place the affected area under cool/tepid (not cold) running water for 15 minutes.

If running water isn't available, you can place the burned area in a bowl of cool/tepid water, though this is not as effective.

If water isn't available, you can use milk or a non-fizzy soft drink. You can use a shower to cool a large burned area, but you must always ensure the shower is on a cool/tepid setting and the water pressure is low. Warm or high pressure water will make the condition worse.

Creams or ointments should not be used as part of first aid treatment as they're not very effective unless the area is cooled first. Also, if creams are applied, they may have to be removed once the person arrives in hospital, to enable medical staff to assess the burn.

Burns to the mouth or throat can be potentially life threatening as swelling in this area can affect a person's breathing. If this occurs, dial 999 for an

Source: <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/firstaid/Pages/Burnsbitesstings.aspx>

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ambulance immediately, loosen all clothing around the person's neck and be prepared to resuscitate.

It is common for swelling to occur following a burn so it's important to remove any tight clothing before the swelling occurs. However, don't remove any clothing or material that may be sticking to a burn. It is possible to remove clothing while the burn is being cooled.

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Once the area has been cooled, cover the burn with a clean, non-fluffy material. This will help to prevent the wound becoming infected and reduce the pain.

An alternative dressing for a burn is a clean, unused plastic bag such as a freezer or sandwich bag, or clean kitchen film (clingfilm). A bag is particularly useful for treating burns to the hand and lower arm.

Once the bag is placed over the hand or arm, secure it in the place using a plaster or bandage. Clingfilm is best for arms or legs. Discard the first piece of clingfilm as it may be contaminated by human hands or food. Place the clean piece of cling-film loosely around the burn.

Once the burn is cooled and covered, seek medical advice.