



First Aid for Minor Burn Injuries Victorian Adult Burns Service

Appropriate first aid will help to minimise the damage when a minor burn occurs. The principles of first aid for minor burns and scalds are firstly, to stop the burning process and then to cool the burn wound. Cooling the surface of the burn wound prevents the progression of damage that occurs in an untreated burn, and provides good pain relief.

Stop the Burning Process

- If your clothes catch fire, stop, drop, cover and roll or smother the fire with a fire blanket or similar. Covering your face will help protect your airway. Hot charred clothing should be removed as it acts as a heat reservoir.
- Scalds may be caused by hot liquids such as water and oil: soaked clothing can retain heat and should be removed as soon as possible.

Cool the Burn Surface

- The burn surface should be cooled with **cool running water for up to 20 minutes**. The temperature of the water should be between 8 and 20°C. This is useful for up to 3 hours post injury. Ordinary tap water is suitable.
- If it is unfeasible to do this, for example if there is no access to clean water, a water gel product such as Burnaid, Burnshield or Waterjel may be applied.
 - Water gel products can be left on for up to 2 hours.
 - Attention will need to be given to the burn after this time.
 - Water gel products should be secured with a clean bandage.
 - These products often help relieve the pain of a minor burn.
- Remove jewellery, metals and restrictive clothing from the burnt area before swelling occurs
- **Do not use ice or iced water.** The extreme cold causes constriction of the blood vessels and can worsen injury by reducing blood supply.

Cover the Burn

- Where the surface is blistered and or raw, the wound should be covered with a dressing. Any sterile non stick dressing (available at chemists) is appropriate. These should be available in your first aid kit.
- The water gel products not only serve to cool the burn surface but can be used as a temporary dressing until you can attend to the burn later.
- In the absence of any wound dressings, cover the wound with plastic film wrap. This is pliable, non-adherent, and impermeable. It will keep the burn wound clean. Because it excludes air, it can be helpful in reducing pain. Otherwise use a clean cloth until you can access medical assistance and/or dressing products.
- Do not use butter, oil, salves or creams as they may retain heat.
- Do not burst blisters until seen by physician.
- Secure dressings with a loose non-constrictive bandage. Dirty bandages should be replaced to avoid possible cross contamination.

Seeking Medical Advice

- Medical advice should be sought in all but the most minor of injuries. In particular see your GP when:
- The severity or depth of burn is uncertain – deeper burns may require surgery
- If larger areas are involved (>1% total body surface area, which is equivalent to the size of the palm of the hand)
- An ambulance (dial 000) should be called with more severe injuries, especially electrical injuries, large burns or when there is smoke inhalation.