



National Burns Awareness Week 13 - 17 May 2024


Burn injuries happen in seconds but can change a person's life forever. It is one of the most common and devastating forms of trauma and has the potential to cause death, lifelong scarring, disfigurement and dysfunction – often resulting in prolonged hospitalisation, psychological trauma, stigma and rejection.

This year National Burns Awareness Week is from 13 - 17 May. Platinum Health (PH) encourages members to prevent burns and to be prepared for any possible emergencies. Most people think that it's not going to happen to them, but being prepared for an emergency can be the best safety tool of all.

The majority of burns occur in and around the home. Be alert to the presence of potential burn hazards in and around your home:

- **Be careful when cooking:** keep children out of the kitchen if possible. The kitchen is full of potential fire hazards – food left unsupervised on the stove or in the oven or microwave, grease spills, electrical appliances and dish towels near burners. Hot oil and porridge are particularly hazardous.
- **Don't neglect maintenance:** chimneys, fireplaces, and wood or coal stoves should be cleaned often.
- **Electrical appliances and cords:** make sure your electrical appliances (such as ovens, stoves, heaters, kettles, toasters and irons) are in good condition, without loose or tattered cords or plugs or worn insulation.
- **Kettles:** kettles are 'weapons of mass destruction'. Keep kettles and kettle cords out of reach of children.
- **Microwaves:** be careful of the high temperatures containers and fluids can be heated to after warming in a microwave. Also steer clear of boiling eggs in a microwave – they often explode on removal and can cause serious facial and eye damage.
- **Fire gels:** fire gels should be used with caution. Pouring gel fuel into a device that is not completely cool may result in a fire or injury, therefore it should never be poured directly from the container onto flames. Burning fire gel sticks to skin and is difficult to extinguish, causing prolonged burning with severe scarring.



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- **Cover electrical outlets:** Make sure to cover all electrical outlets with outlet covers so that children aren't tempted to play with them and stick things like fingers or toys into them. Illegal and make-shift electrical wires lead to devastating electric injuries (often leading to finger and hand amputations).
 - **Be safe if you smoke:** lit cigarettes or matches can be an ignition source. Avoid smoking in bed (and indoors) and use child-resistant lighters.
 - **Use candles safely:** Blow out candles before leaving a room and keep them out of reach of children, away from curtains and furniture and make sure that they are in sturdy holders.
 - **Chemicals:** know when the chemicals you use are a potential hazard. Use cabinet locks on cabinets that contain chemicals and always store chemicals in their original containers. Do not store in milk or plastic containers. Beware of hair colourants and chemical hair straightening treatments – it can cause severe chemical burns in children.
 - **Be prepared:** Teach children the hazards of fires and educate them on how to avoid foreseeable dangers. Be prepared for an emergency by creating a fire escape plan with the whole family.

FIRST AID FOR BURNS - What to do:

1. **Remove the victim to safety** - Remove the person from the area/source of the fire hazard.
2. **Remove clothing** - Remove clothing from the burnt area. Do not remove it if stuck to the skin.
3. **Cool the burn** - Run cool water over the burn or submerge the burnt area, for 10 – 15 minutes.
4. **Cover the burnt area** - Cover the burn with a clean non-sticking sterile dressing or cloth. Do not break blisters and do not apply anything on the burnt area, especially butter or any oil-based products as the oil can trap the heat and make the burn deeper over time.
5. **Consider taking over-the-counter pain medication.** Paracetamol or ibuprofen can help relieve the pain and reduce inflammation.
6. **Get further treatment** - Call an ambulance (0861 746 548) or take the victim to the nearest clinic, hospital or doctor for further treatment.

The impact of severe burn injuries extends beyond the patients themselves; it also affects the friends and families who love and support them, therefore PH urges parents and caregivers to be aware of the dangers posed and to take steps to keep their families safe.

Source

<https://www.westerncape.gov.za/news/national-burns-awareness-week-be-prepared-emergency>
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-burns/basics/art-20056649>