

# **Patient Information - Dealing with burns**

**Burns**

**Patient information leaflet**

**Emergency Department**

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[www.dgt.nhs.uk](http://www.dgt.nhs.uk)

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## What is a burn or a scald?

A burn is damage to the skin, usually caused by heat. A scald is damage to the skin caused by moist heat.

## Types of burns

- **Superficial** burns or scalds affect the top layer of skin only. They do not usually blister or scar e.g. mild sunburn.
- **Partial thickness** burns or scalds cause deeper damage. The skin forms blisters and is painful. However, some of the deeper layer of skin (the dermis) is unharmed. This means the skin can usually heal well, sometimes without scarring if the burn is not too deep or extensive.
- **Full thickness** burns or scalds damage all layers of skin. There may be little or no pain as the nerve endings are destroyed. These often require skin grafting.
- **Electrical burns** can cause damage inside the body even if there is little damage to the skin.

## Treatment for a burn

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.

- Run cold water over the affected area for 20 minutes
- Cover the affected area with cling film or non-stick dressing
- Your wound will be assessed, and the appropriate dressing will be applied if required. Not all burns require a dressing.

Keep the dressing clean and dry. Do not remove it until you are seen again.

- Elevate the burnt area if you are able to and use painkillers as advised for your pain.
- Regularly and gently exercise the joints which are within the burnt area. Attend any appointments made for you, even if your burn is getting better.

## **Discharge advice**

Most burns take 2-3 weeks to heal, but can sometimes take up to 6 weeks.

Itching in the first week or so is completely normal and is usually a sign that the skin is healing. Your pain should not be worsening. If it is, seek medical advice from your practice nurse at your GP surgery.

A burn that has healed can still be fragile if damaged again, so protect the area well. Sunburn can affect a burnt area more than the surrounding skin for up to 2 years afterwards. So avoid direct sunlight and use a good quality high UVA and UVB rated sun protection.

All burns and scalds are at risk of infection due to areas of broken skin.  
Do not touch or pick the burns.

Look for signs of infection such as increased redness and warmth, increased pain, oozing from the wound.

If you notice these signs, see your GP or Practice Nurse for a wound check.

## **Further/Specialist Support**

Depending on the severity of the burn, follow up care may be at the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, our specialist burns unit. You will be told by your clinician if this is applicable to you.

## **Further Support**

For general medical advice please use the NHS website, the NHS 111 service, walk-incentres, or your GP.

NHS website provides online health information and guidance at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**This leaflet has been developed in partnership with the Patient Information Group and our DGT Patient Partners**

## **Patient Information**

Further patient leaflets are available from the Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust website: <https://www.dgt.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-leaflets> Please ask a member of staff if you require information in another language or format.

## **Complaints, Comments, Concerns and Compliments**

Please speak to the staff in the ward or department caring for you if you have any concerns or questions relating to your care or that of a loved one.

Compliments can be shared by visiting: <https://www.dgt.nhs.uk/contact-us/compliments>

Alternatively, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01322 428382 Email: [dgn-tr.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:dgn-tr.PALS@nhs.net)

## **Patient Property**

Please do not bring large sums of money or valuable items into the hospital. Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property unless it is handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust operate smoke-free hospitals. This means that smoking is not permitted anywhere on hospital grounds. For

help to quit smoking please visit [www.kentcht.nhs.uk/service/one-you-smokefree/](http://www.kentcht.nhs.uk/service/one-you-smokefree/)

Use of alcohol or illicit drugs is not permitted anywhere on the hospital site.  
For drug and alcohol support please speak to your nurse or doctor or

Visit: [www.changegrowlive.org/westkent/help](http://www.changegrowlive.org/westkent/help)

Call: 0330 128 1113

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