

Skin care after a burn injury

Following treatment only in A&E / Minor Injuries Unit



Information for patients
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals



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When you have had a burn or scald there are a few things that you can do to help it once it has healed.

Can I wash my skin normally now that it has healed?

It is fine to bath or shower as often as you would normally do, once you are not wearing dressings. It is good for your skin to wash, bath or shower once daily as this helps to make sure the cream is cleaned off properly. We do recommend that you use a non-perfumed soap or baby soap at first though, in place of your usual soap, as some ordinary soaps can dry out your skin and make it itchy and sore. Using a flannel to wash with is also a good idea as the fabric is just right for cleaning well but gently.

Is there anything else I need to do to help my new skin?

Sometimes when skin has healed, it doesn't produce the natural moisturisers that keep skin supple straight away. Massaging in a small amount of non-perfumed moisturising cream, such as Diprobase, about three times a day can really help. It will help to stop your skin becoming dry and cracking. It can also help if itching is a problem. It is important not to use too much cream and to wash it off thoroughly at least once a day, as otherwise spots and blackheads can occur. Your nurse can show you how much cream to use and how to massage it in. Too much cream and rubbing it in too hard can cause blistering and skin breakdown. If your skin does get small blisters or areas that break down, it is best to cover them with a small dressing, like you did before it healed. It usually gets better quickly, but if it does not do so you can get in touch with your GP.

Why have I been told to wear sun-cream?

When your skin is first healed, it is very delicate, like a baby's skin, and it won't have its normal protection against the sun. It is important to

wear a high factor sun-cream (Factor 50) when you go out in the sun, even if you are not going to be sitting in it. Without the sun-cream, your skin will burn more easily and if it does become tanned, it may not fade like a normal tan, instead leaving you with a permanent brown stain on your skin. This can be the case for up to 2 years or until your skin pigment returns to normal. This is still true for people with black skin who may not have worried much about care in the sun before the burn.

Clothing which does not allow sunlight to pass through it will also provide enough protection from the sun. If your burn was on your face or neck then a peaked cap or broad-brimmed hat as well as sun-cream may be useful.

What can I do to help with itching?

During healing and sometimes afterwards, the skin can be very itchy. It is far better to try and soothe the itch, rather than scratch it as in the long run, this will only cause it to become itchier as well as damaging your new skin.

Washing your skin with very hot water will make it itchier, so try to wash with cooler (but not cold) water. Avoid products containing strong perfumes; go for non-perfumed soap or bath oils or baby soap instead. Regular use of a non-perfumed moisturising cream will also help relieve the itch. Make sure that you keep your fingernails cut short to avoid accidental scratching whilst asleep. Anti-histamine tablets are available over the counter in chemists or supermarket pharmacies. Ask the chemist for advice on which brand to buy. Avoiding woollen or nylon clothing can also help your skin to be less itchy.

Is there anything else I need to look out for?

Scarring can be a problem after burns have healed. Usually, it is only a problem for people whose burns have taken longer than 3 weeks to heal and people who have had a skin graft. The kind of scarring we are

talking about is hard, lumpy raised scarring which can often be quite red in colour. This is called hypertrophic scarring and people who are likely to develop it can be referred for scar management. Occasionally, people who are not in the above groups do start to develop this scarring due to their genetic make-up. If you are going to develop it, it will happen in the first 6-8 weeks after healing and if you think that it is developing then you should contact your GP as you can be referred for scar management.

When burns first heal, they are often pink in colour. This is due to all the extra tiny blood vessels your body has made to heal the burn. It usually fades in the weeks after the burn has healed but can remain for longer. People with black skin often notice that their new skin grows back pink initially. How black skin pigment returns is very unpredictable, sometimes it comes back lighter, sometimes darker and sometimes rather unevenly, or it can exactly match your original skin colour. What is certain is that it will change, usually for the better, over the weeks and early months after healing. In other words, what you see when you have first healed is not the end result and often it can improve fairly quickly.

Cosmetic camouflage is a kind of make-up which can be used to disguise permanent changes in skin pigmentation. This is available at a clinic which is run at the Northern General Hospital through the Pharmacy Department. If you think that you would be interested in this you can be referred for an appointment. Your GP can refer you.



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