



How to Treat a Hot Water Spill on Your Skin

Expert
Reviewed

Three Parts: [Assessing the Situation](#) [Treating a Minor Burn](#) [Treating a Severe Burn](#)

Burns caused by scalding hot water are one of the most common household accidents. A hot drink, hot bathwater or hot water from the stove can easily spill onto the skin and scald it. It can happen to anyone and at any time. If you know how to assess the situation, and decide what kind of burn you have, you can figure out how to treat the injury quickly.

Part
1

Assessing the Situation

1 Look for signs of first degree burns. After you spill hot water on your skin, you need to figure out what kind of burn you have. Burns are categorized by degree, where a higher degree means a worse burn. A first degree burn is a superficial burn to the top layer of skin. The symptoms you experience from a first degree burn include:^{[1][2]}

- Damage to the top layer of skin
- Dry, red, and painful skin
- Skin blanching, or turning white, when you press it
- These will heal within three to six days without scarring

2 Identify a second degree burn. If the water is hotter or you are exposed for a longer period of time, you may develop a second degree burn. This is considered a superficial partial-thickness burn. The symptoms include:^{[3][4]}

- Damage to the two layers of your skin, but only in a superficial capacity on the second layer
- Redness and leaking fluid at the burn site
- Blistering
- Blanching of the affected area when pressed
- Pain when touched lightly and with temperature changes
- These take one to three weeks to heal and may scar or discolor, where it is darker or lighter than the surrounding skin

3 Recognize a third degree burn. A third degree burn happens when the water is extremely hot or you are exposed for longer periods of time. It is considered a deep partial-thickness burn. The symptoms of a third degree burn include:^{[5][6]}

- Damage to the two layers of your skin that penetrates deeper into, but not completely through, the second layer
- Pain at the site of the burn when pressed hard (though they can be painless at the time of injury, as there may be nerve death or damage)
- The skin will not blanch (turn white) when pressed
- Blisters forming at the site of the burn
- Charred, leathery appearance or peeling
- Third degree burns require a visit to the hospital and often require surgical intervention or hospital treatment to recover if they are over 5 % of the body

4 Watch for a fourth degree burn. A fourth degree burn is the most severe burn you can have. This is a severe injury and requires immediate emergency assistance. The symptoms include:^{[7][8]}

- Damage completely through the two layers of your skin, often with damage to the underlying fat and muscle. With third and fourth degree burns, even the bone can be affected.
- It isn't painful
- Color change at the site of the burn - white, gray, or black
- Dryness at the site of the burn
- Requires surgery to be treated and likely hospitalization to recover

5 Look for a major burn. No matter what degree a burn is, a burn can be considered a major burn if it covers the joints or is over the majority of your body. If you have any complications with your vital signs or cannot do normal activities because of the burn, it may be considered major.

- A limb is equal to about 10% of an adult's body; 20% is an adult man's torso. If over 20% of the total body surface area burned, this is considered a major burn.
- 5% of body area (forearm area, half a leg, etc.) burned in total thickness ie: third or fourth degree, is a major burn.
- Treat these kinds of burns the same as you would a third or fourth degree burn - seek immediate emergency treatment.^[9]

Part 2

Treating a Minor Burn

1 Identify situations which require medical attention. Even though a burn may be minor, which is a first or second degree burn, it can still need medical attention if it meets certain criteria. If the burns wrap around the entire surrounding tissue of any or several of your fingers, you should seek medical attention as soon as you can. This can restrict the flow of blood to your fingers, which, in extreme cases, could lead to finger amputation if left untreated.^[10]

- You should also seek medical attention if the burn, mild or otherwise, covers your face or neck, a large area of your hands, groin, legs, feet, buttocks, or is above joints.^[11]

2 Clean the burn. If the burn is minor you can take care of the wound at home. The first step is to clean the burn. To do this remove any clothing that covers the burn and immerse in cold water. Running water over it can damage the skin and may increase the likelihood of scarring or complicating damage. Do not use hot water because it can irritate the burn.

- Wash the burn with a mild soap.
- Avoid using any disinfectants, such as hydrogen peroxide. These can slow healing.
- If your clothes are stuck to your skin do not attempt to remove them yourself. Your burn is likely more severe than you think and you should seek emergency medical attention.^{[12][13]} Cut the clothing, except for that attached to the burn, and place cold packs/wrapped ice on the burn and the clothing for up to two minutes

3 Cool the burn. After you wash the burn immerse the burned area in cool water for 15 to 20 minutes. Do not use ice or running water because this can cause further damage. Next, wet a washcloth with cool water and apply it to your burn, but do not rub. Just lay the cloth over the area.

- You can prepare the cloth by dampening it in tap water and refrigerating it until cooled.
- Do not use butter on the wound. It will not help cool the burn off and can actually cause infection.^{[14][15][16]}

4 Prevent infection. In order to help prevent the burn from becoming infected, you need to take care of it after you cool it off. Apply an antibiotic ointment such as Neosporin or bacitracin with a clean finger or a cotton ball. If the burn is an open wound use non-stick gauze instead because the fibers of a cotton ball may catch in an open wound. Next, cover the burn with a bandage that doesn't stick to the burn area, such as Telfa. Change the bandage one to two times a day and reapply the ointment.

- Do not pop any blisters that form.
- If the skin begins to itch while it heals avoid scratching it or it may become infected. Burned skin is highly sensitive to infection.

- You can also apply ointments to help ease the itching such as aloe vera, cocoa butter, and mineral oil.

5 Treat the pain. Any minor burn you experience will likely cause pain. Once you cover the wound, raise the area of your burn above your heart. This will decrease any swelling and ease your pain. To help with any lingering pain, take over-the-counter pain medications, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil and Motrin). Take these pills several times a day as instructed as long as the pain stays.

- Recommended dosage for Acetaminophen is 650 mg every four to six hours, with a maximum daily dose of 3250 mg.
- Recommended dosage for Ibuprofen is 400 to 800 mg every six hours, with a maximum daily dose of 3200 mg.
- Make sure to read the dosage recommendations on the medication container, as dosing may vary with different types and brands.

Part 3

Treating a Severe Burn

1 Call emergency services. If you think you have a severe burn, which would be a third or fourth degree burn, you need to call for help immediately. These are too severe to treat at home and need to be treated by professionals.^[17] Call emergency services if the burn:^[18]

- Is deep and severe
- Is more than a first degree burn and you haven't had a tetanus shot in more than five years
- Is bigger than 3 inches (7.6 cm) or encircles any body part
- Shows signs of infection, such as increased redness or pain, areas that leak pus, or fever
- Is on a person less than five years or more than 70 years old
- Happens to someone who has difficulty fighting infection, such as those with HIV, those on immunosuppressive medications, those with diabetes, or those with liver disease

2 Take care of the victim. If you are helping a loved one who has been burned, check for responsiveness after you call emergency services. If they are not responding or going into shock, tell emergency services so they know what to expect.

- If the person is not breathing, focus on doing [chest compressions](#) until emergency services arrive.^[19]

3 Remove any clothing. While you wait for help to arrive, take off any constrictive clothing and jewelry that are on or near the burn site. However, leave on any clothing or jewelry that might be stuck in the burn. This will pull off the skin at the site of the burn and cause further injury.


- Place cold packs around any metal jewelry such as rings or hard to remove bracelets, as metal jewelry will conduct the heat of the burn up from the surrounding skin and back to the burn site.
- You can cut loose clothing off around the area where it is stuck to the burn.
- Keep yourself or the victim warm because severe burns can cause you to go into shock.^[20]
- Unlike with minor burns avoid soaking the burn in water as this may cause hypothermia. If the burn is on a moveable part of the body, elevate the area above the heart to help prevent or reduce swelling.^[21]
- Do not take any pain medication, pop blisters, scrape dead skin, or apply any ointment. This could interfere with your medical treatment.^{[22][23]}

4 Cover your burn. Once you get any problem clothing off of your burn, cover the burn with clean, non-stick bandages. This will keep it from getting infected. Make sure you don't use any material that may stick to the burn. Use non-stick gauze or a wet bandage.


- If you think the bandage may get stuck because the burn is too severe, do nothing and wait for emergency services.^[24]

Community Q&A


What cream should I use on my hot water red burn?

 Aloe is excellent on burns. If the burn is severe, consult a doctor.
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Can I swim in the ocean with my burnt skin?

 No, you should stay out of the sun and the ocean until your skin has healed.
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How can I ease the pain associated with the burn?

 Do not run the burn under cold water. Room temperature water absorbs heat better. Soak wherever the burn is in a bowl of water at room temperature for twenty minutes and take some over-the-counter pain medication.
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I was burnt by boiling water. I went to the hospital, but my foot is still itching and there is water coming out on my feet. What can I do?

 Wrap your feet an a cloth soaked with aloe or a soothing oil. Make sure that it is warm. If it continues, consult a doctor.
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Hot water spilled on my leg, and it is still painful and red two years later. What should I do?

 Go to the doctor - it may be permanent scarring, but go to the doctor because it may not be the hot water.
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How should I treat a second degree burn?

 Try lukewarm water. If this doesn't help, put a heat pack in the microwave for 15 seconds, then put an ice pack around it and apply it to the burn. This should keep the pain at bay until you get to a doctor or hospital.
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Can you answer these readers' questions?

[Refresh](#)

On **How to Ship a Package with UPS**, a reader asks:

What's the shipping rate of a package?

On **How to Sell Old Phonograph Records**, a reader asks:

How do I find someone to buy my old records?

On **How to Grow Orchids Outside**, a reader asks:

Which type of fertilizers should we use to care for the outdoor orchids? Can you name them?

Warnings

- A burn that looks serious but has no pain is worse than you think. Cool immediately and, when in doubt, seek emergency care. Many people think third degree burns are not serious at first due to the pain-blocking mechanism. Failure to cool the burn and seek treatment as soon as possible can lead to further damage, complications to the healing process and increased scarring.

Sources and Citations

1. http://www.uptodate.com/contents/classification-of-burns?source=search_result&search=burn&selectedTitle=2~150
2. http://www.uptodate.com/contents/skin-burns-the-basics?source=search_result&search=burn&selectedTitle=1~150
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