

# Burns and Scalds

Burns and scalds are a leading cause of injury to young children, with toddlers most at risk because of their increased mobility and natural curiosity.

There are five main categories of burns – scald, flame, contact, friction, and chemical.

## Main causes of injury

All burns can be serious, but the leading cause of burns in young children is scalds caused by hot foods and drinks, steam and liquids. Children are most commonly scalded by hot food and drinks (tea, coffee, soups, noodles) that have been pulled down off benches, resulting in serious burns to the face, neck, chest, and shoulders.

Even small burns, depending on where they occur, can have long-term consequences for your child. Severe burns often require ongoing physiotherapy and multiple surgeries.

## Ways to prevent burns and scalds

Burn injuries often occur in the home, most commonly in kitchens and bathrooms, but other hotspots include fireplaces and camping sites. By taking a few minutes to make your home and environment as safe as possible, you could prevent a life-changing injury.

### In the kitchen

Always supervise your child in the kitchen, and if possible encourage them to stay out of the kitchen while you are cooking or preparing meals.

- Keep your child away from hot foods and liquids (eg tea, coffee, soups, noodles). Move hot drinks and foods away from the edge of the table.
- Store the kettle and cord away from the edge of the bench, and turn pot handles in so that children can't reach them.

### In the bathroom

The temperature of hot water delivered to basins, baths, and showers should not exceed 50°C (a licensed plumber can set the temperature correctly).

- Always test the water before letting your child get in the shower or bath.
- Fill the bath with cold water first, then add the hot water.

### Around the home and outdoors

Install fixed firescreens or heater guards around open or glass-fronted fires and heaters.

- Keep lighters, matches and open flames (eg candles, decorative alcohol-fueled devices, ethanol burners) out of reach.
- Check your smoke alarm is in working order. Test batteries every month, and replace them every year at the end of daylight savings.
- Always supervise children when camping. Keep your child away from campfires and coals and make sure they always wear shoes outside — old coals can often still be hot from the day before.

## First aid for burns and scalds

Treatment is the same for all burn injuries.

As soon as possible, hold the burn under cool running water for 20 minutes only. This is useful for up to three hours after the burn. Remove clothing or jewellery that is not stuck to the burn. Sometimes you will need to cut clothing to remove it. It's important to try to keep your child warm and just target the burn with the cool water.

Cover the burn with a loose, non-stick dressing (sterile non-stick dressing or plastic cling film) until your child is seen by doctor — a new dressing may be applied. This will keep the burn clean and help to reduce pain.

## You should seek medical help immediately if:

- the burn is deep, even if the child does not feel any pain
- the burn is larger than 3cm or has blisters
- the burn is on the face, hands or genitals
- the burn is to the throat or airway
- you are concerned or unsure about the injury.

Do not use ice to cool the burn as this may make the burn worse. Never apply any lotions, creams or food items (including egg whites, butter, toothpaste, potato). Cool running water is best.

**Call 000 for an ambulance immediately if your child has a severe burn injury.**

## Key points to remember

- Always supervise children in the kitchen, and keep hot food and drinks out of reach.
- Limit the temperature of hot water that reaches your bath and shower to 50°C.
- Use cool running water to treat a burn as soon as possible and seek medical attention.

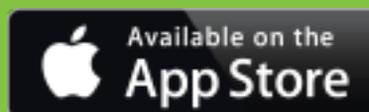
## More information

- See Kids Health Info fact sheets on [Burns – general treatment](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Burns_general_treatment/) ([http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Burns\\_general\\_treatment/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Burns_general_treatment/)), [Burns on the face](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Burns_on_the_face/) ([http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Burns\\_on\\_the\\_face/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Burns_on_the_face/)) and [Burns clinic at the RCH](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Burns_clinic_at_the_RCH/) ([http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Burns\\_clinic\\_at\\_the\\_RCH/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Burns_clinic_at_the_RCH/)).

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## Kids Health Info app

The app will enable you to search and browse more than three hundred medical fact sheets and work offline.



### Disclaimer

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