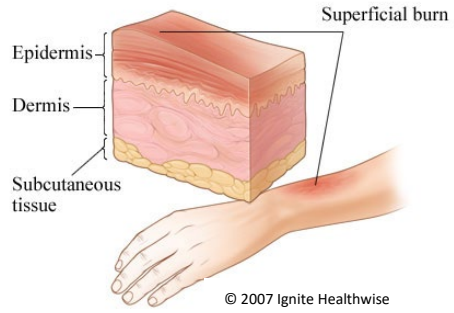
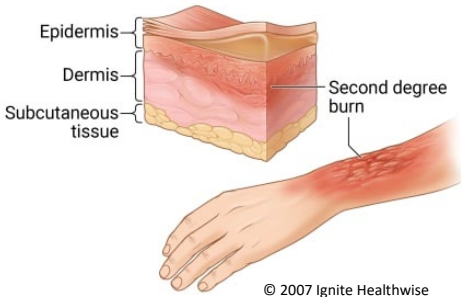
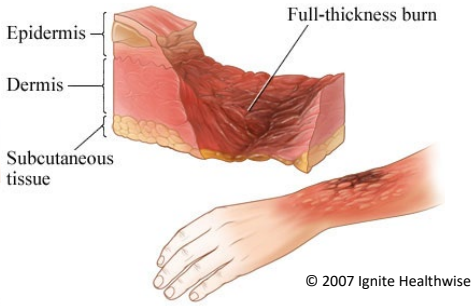
Burn Care at Home

Degree of Skin Burn

1st Degree Burns	2nd Degree Burns	3rd Degree Burns
		
• Superficial injury, involves only top layer of skin • Pale skin tones: appears red, like a sunburn • Dark skin tones: may appear red or darker than normal • Often painful	• Open, shiny, moist, blistered and pink or red. • Painful and sensitive to touch • Often take 1-3 weeks to heal. • May be treated at home, in the clinic or in the hospital.	• Dry or leathery, white, brown, maroon, dark red or black. • Not sensitive to pain • Often take more than 3 weeks to heal or need skin grafting • Treated at home only if they are quite small

Burn Care at Home

1. **Remove the dressing.** Do not soak it to remove it. Take off the dressing when it is dry. This cleans away dead tissue.
2. **Wash burns gently once a day** with unscented, antimicrobial soap. (Burn on the face should be washed twice a day.) Do not use baby soap or soaps with lotion in it. Wash off the antibiotic cream/ointment, blisters, and loose skin. Rinse well. A small amount of bleeding is normal.
3. **Apply antimicrobial cream or ointment.** Remove the antibiotic cream/ointment from the jar or tube with gloves or washed hands so germs do not get in the container.

Apply a thin layer of cream or ointment to the burn daily.

- For **face burns:** apply twice a day, and more often if your face gets dry. No gauze is needed on the face. Shave facial hair once a day.
- For **ear burns:** apply twice a day. Do not get cream/ointment in the ear canal. It may build up and plug the ears.

4. **Apply a non-stick gauze**.
5. **Wrap all burns** except the face and ears with non-stretch roller gauze. You may need extra layers of gauze if the wound is weepy.
6. **Apply compression** sleeve, stockings, or glove.

Pain Control

- Never use ice on your burn. It decreases blood flow and prevents healing of your burn.
- Pain medicine may be prescribed to help with dressing changes. Take pain pills 1 hour before dressing changes. Between dressing changes, take Tylenol® (acetaminophen or extra strength acetaminophen) if needed. As your burn heals, you will have less pain. It may feel stiff or like it is being pulled as it heals.

How to Prevent Swelling

Compression and elevation are very important to help prevent swelling, promote healing and help with pain.

- **Face or head burns**: Elevate your head when you sleep.
- **Hand or arm burns**: Rest your hand or arm on pillows above the level of the heart as much as you can.
- **Foot and leg burns**: Keep feet and legs up on pillows when you sit or are in bed. Keep your heels off the edge of the pillow.

Mobility

Be sure to keep moving your burned body part as you normally would before your injury. This helps to keep the new skin from growing in too tight. Be sure to:

- Exercise to keep joints moving and to stretch new skin.
- Keep moving and walk often.

Smoking

If you smoke, we strongly encourage you to stop. Smoking decreases blood flow and oxygen to new and healed burns. It slows down the healing process.

Diet

Drink plenty of fluids with extra protein, 8-10 (8 oz.) glasses in 24 hours, to prevent dehydration.

It is also important to eat a well-balanced diet that is high in protein to help the wound(s) heal.

Healed Skin

Use moisture creams to prevent drying and cracking. Healed skin appears shiny pink. Apply moisture creams that are perfume and dye-free such as Lubriderm, Eucerin® or Nivea® as often as needed to keep the skin moist and soft. Avoid creams with alcohol or numbing agents.

When to Call

Call your doctor if you have any signs and symptoms of infection such as:

- Redness (about 1 inch in width) and swelling around the burn.
- Foul smelling drainage from the wound.
- Flu-like symptoms (chills, nausea, vomiting, or muscle aches, or temperature higher than 100.4ºF by mouth for two readings taken 4 hours apart).
- Increasing burn pain not helped by prescribed pain medicine.

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Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8397.