

Burns

Burns and scalds occur when skin layers and cells are destroyed by various methods (chemical, electrical, thermal and radiation)¹.

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Quick facts

- Children aged 0-4 years are most at risk compared to any other age group.
- Aboriginal people make up approximately 15% of all burns cases in WA hospitals but represent only 3-4% of the population².
- About 10% of adult burns are associated with alcohol or other drugs².

Types of burns

Electrical burns are caused by an electrically generated current.

Things to remember:

- The human body conducts electricity.
- Know how to disconnect the power supply and do this before helping a victim of an electrical burn.
- Always hire a licensed electrician for all wiring jobs around the home.
- Do not use any power cords or leads that are damaged or frayed.
- Always remove the cord from the wall by the plastic plug, not by pulling on the cord.



- Have an RCD (Residual Current Device) or safety switch installed³.

Chemical burns are caused by chemicals such as acids reacting on the skin.

Things to remember:

- Secure all chemicals, in and around your home, in locked cabinets and out of reach of children.
- When using chemicals, always follow directions and safety precautions.

- Wear safety clothing and eye protection.

- Avoid mixing chemicals⁴.

Thermal burns are caused by an external heat source such as a fire or hot gas that increases the temperature of the skin and deep tissue.

Things to remember:

- Do not smoke cigarettes in bed.
- Do not leave fires or candles burning unattended and ensure they are put out fully.

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- Turn off heaters before going to sleep.
- Install smoke detectors in the house and check regularly.
- Teach children to respect fire and not to play with fire or burning objects. For children specific prevention tips contact Kidsafe WA⁵.

Radiation burns are caused by lengthy exposure to UV rays and/or x-rays.

Things to remember:

- Solariums use artificial Ultraviolet A and Ultraviolet B radiation, and both are known to be directly responsible for causing skin cancer and prematurely ageing skin.
- Some cosmetics and prescription drugs (such as antibiotics, drugs for high blood pressure, antidepressants, some medication for skin conditions, drugs that suppress the immune system and some anti-inflammatory drugs) can increase the skin's sensitivity to ultraviolet radiation.
- Be informed about the risks associated with ultraviolet radiation.
- For more information visit the Cancer Council website www.cancer.org.au

Information and support

For immediate help:
Ambulance 000, or your local GP.

For further information on first aid for burns and scalds, visit www.stjohn.org.au

For information on preventing childhood burns and scalds contact Kidsafe WA on 08 9340 8509 or 1800 802 244 (country callers) or visit www.kidsafewa.com.au

Electrical burns have the potential to be very serious as the depth of the burn can be greater than is apparent and can cause heart irregularities.

References

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3. Better Health Channel 2008, *Electricity – safety issues*, Department of Health, Victoria, <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Electricity_safety_issues?OpenDocument>.
4. eMedicineHealth 2009, *Chemical burns – prevention*, WebMD, <http://www.emedicinehealth.com/chemical_burns/page10_em.htm>.
5. eMedicineHealth 2009, *Thermal (heat or fire) burns*, WebMD, <http://www.emedicinehealth.com/thermal_heat_or_fire_burns/page10_em.htm>.

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ICCWA is the peak not for profit organisation involved in injury prevention and community safety promotion in Western Australia. Our mission is to reduce the incidence of injuries and their effects on the community.