

Children with burn injuries

Each year in the United States, more than 2 million burn injuries require medical attention. About half of burn injuries affect children.

Major advances in the treatment of burn injuries have made it possible to save the lives of children with severe burns. A study in the January 5, 2000, issue of *JAMA* reports that children who suffer burns to more than 70% of their bodies are able to recover sufficiently to enjoy a decent quality of life. Although some surviving children had lingering physical disability, most benefited from comprehensive burn care.

PREVENTING BURNS:

- Keep children at a safe distance from hot liquids.
- Set your home water temperature heater at 120 degrees.
- Avoid using a tablecloth if you have toddlers at home (they may pull on it and cause hot objects on the table to fall).
- Make sure babies and older children sleep in flame-retardant sleepwear.
- Teach older children about fire safety, how to get out of the house safely in case of a fire, and what to do if their clothes catch on fire.



In the kitchen:

- While cooking, keep young children in a high chair or playpen, at a safe distance from hot surfaces, hot liquids and other kitchen hazards.
 - Use extra caution if you use a deep fat cooker or fryer when children are around.
- Keep appliance cords away from edge of counters, and keep them unplugged and disconnected when not being used.
- Keep pot handles turned in so pots cannot be pulled or knocked off the stove.
- Do not put baby walkers where they can reach the stove.



Microwaves:

- When heating food for a young child, sample the food for temperature safety before feeding it to the child.
- Keep children away from the microwave and other heating appliances when removing hot food.
- Heating baby formula or milk in bottles with disposable plastic linings may be dangerous because the liner may burst. Using a baby bottle warmer may provide a safer way to heat baby bottles.
- Do not hold a child in your arms while removing items from the microwave.



Matches and lighters:

- Don't leave cigarettes, matches or lighters unattended and keep them out of sight and out of reach of young children.
- Children should be taught that cigarettes, matches and lighters are not toys and they should never play with them.

TYPES OF BURNS:

- **First-degree** – Burns that affect only the outer layer of the skin (**epidermis**).
- **Second-degree** – Burns that damage the first and second layer of the skin (**dermis**).
- **Third-degree** – Burns that damage the skin to its full depth and damage the underlying tissues; often requires skin **grafting** (surgery to replace the skin).

WHAT TO DO FOR MAJOR BURNS:

Burns can be **thermal** (caused by contact with open flames, hot liquids, hot surfaces, and other sources of high heat), **chemical** (caused by detergents, cleaning agents, bleach or other chemicals) or **electrical**. For a very major burn, it is important to:

- Stop the burning. Remove the child from the burn source.
- Check breathing.
- Cover the burn with a sterile pad or clean sheet.
- Get the child immediately to the nearest hospital for medical attention.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Shriners Hospitals for Children 800/237-5055 (for information only) or www.shrinershq.org
- Consumer Product Safety Commission Hotline (for information) 800/638-2772 800/638-8270 (TTY) or www.cpsc.gov

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.

Additional Sources: Shriners Hospitals for Children, National Institute of General Medical Services, Consumer Product Safety Commission

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