

For burns at home, knowing first-aid technique is key

November 22 2010, By Katy Cosse

For many, Thanksgiving means home-cooked meals: stuffing on the stove and turkey from the oven. But if you're not careful, a hot pan could mean a painful burn instead of a tasty dinner.

Most minor [burns](#) will eventually heal on their own, says UC Health burn expert J. Kevin Bailey, MD, but immediate action can reduce the pain and possible scarring of first- and second-degree burns.

In first-degree burns, the skin is red and swollen, with just damage to the outer layer of skin, the epidermis. In second-degree burns, the damage has reached to the dermis, the second layer of skin. Second-degree burns can develop blisters, which can act as natural bandage for smaller burns.

When treating a first- or second-degree burn, try to stop the heat immediately. Submerge the burned area in cool water or hold it under a faucet of cool water. But don't reach for ice—it can cause damage to the skin by causing a minor case of frostbite.

"If there is any clothing or jewelry on the affected area, you want to get it off before you start to swell," says Bailey. "That could be while you run the water or simply take a quick break."

Bailey says the most common severe burns he sees are from hot grease—when a pan catches fire and people try to take the burning grease out of the house.

"Prevention is best," he says. "Simply cover the pan to extinguish the fire or use an approved fire extinguisher. If you are burned by grease, it usually involves the hands and tends to be much deeper than a scald from hot water. In general, you should see a health care provider for those burns."

You should also seek professional care for severe second-degree burns, burns covering a large part of the body or affecting the face and especially third-degree burns, those that burn all levels of skin and tissues below.

While minor burns are healing, over-the-counter anti-inflammatories like Tylenol and ibuprofen can ease pain and burn creams can help the damaged skin retain moisture and avoid infection.

"There are a host of OTC burn sprays and creams," says Bailey. "We treat our patients with bacitracin. But as a word of caution, it is possible to develop rashes to the antibiotics that may be worse than the burn, so keep an eye on the area—if the treatment seems to be making things worse, change course or ask for help."

While you should ignore the old wife's tale about butter or mayonnaise for a burn, Bailey says one kitchen good can be helpful for some patients: "When a burn starts to heal, it may take weeks before the skin can properly moisturize itself. For our patients who may be sensitive to commercial moisturizers, we will recommend unflavored vegetable shortening."

But baking aids aside, the most important thing you can do for a healing burn is keep it protected: "Use moisturizer to avoid dry, cracked skin and sunblock (SPF of at least 30). The melanocytes (skin cells that give our [skin](#) color) are very sensitive until the pinkness of the wound fades. If you are not careful, you can end up with a blotchy suntan that could be

permanent.”

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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