

Check your summer burn IQ

5 July 2013, by Serena Gordon, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Sunburn might be the first thing that comes to mind when you think of summer burns, but it's not the only burn that could spoil your summertime fun.

"Prevention is a simple thing for the majority of burns—it just takes some simple common sense and being willing to adhere to doing something safely," said Dr. James Holmes, director of the Burn Center and an associate professor of surgery at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, N.C. "Most people know burns can happen, but they don't think it will happen to them."

But if you use a grill, sit around a fire pit, light up the sky with fireworks or spend any time outside, here are some suggestions to help you avoid burns this summer:

Sun

Chances are you know by now that a lot of sun exposure is not a good thing. Not only is sunburn a possibility, but in the long term it makes the development of [skin cancer](#) more likely.

Yet despite good intentions, people do burn—children, especially. How do you know if a sunburn needs medical attention?

"Children are more susceptible to serious burns because of their thinner skin," said Sheila Giles, a [registered nurse](#) and the burn program coordinator at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. "If they've got a burn with blisters, they need medical attention. Or, if the burn covers a large part of their body. If the child isn't playful, or isn't drinking, you should have them looked at."

Giles said it's common for parents to bring in children who've been burned on a cloudy day, apparently not realizing that a burn can occur even when the sun isn't shining.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration advises that time in the sun be limited, especially between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest. Wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a [sun protection factor](#) (SPF) of at least 15, and reapply it often and liberally. Wear sunglasses and have your children wear sunglasses with UV protection to protect the eyes.

Fire

Backyard fire pits have become increasingly popular, and the old-standby campfire still reigns among many summertime campers. But fire poses risks, too.

Giles said she's seen cases where a toddler has fallen into a fire pit. Rather than trying to get out to avoid injury, toddlers tend to freeze, which makes their injuries even more severe.

Older kids aren't exempt from fire risks, either. Teenagers like to throw things into fires to see what might happen, she said, and when that's an aerosol can or gasoline, the results can be catastrophic.

All of which makes supervision around fire critical. "Never assume that your child or adolescent is aware of the dangers of fire," Giles said. "Educate them, and talk about safety, but don't assume they're safe because a fire pit is enclosed."

Holmes said that in certain areas of the country, it's still common for people to burn trash. "If you're going to burn your trash and you plan on using an accelerant, you need the right one: diesel, kerosene or charcoal starter, but not gasoline," he said.

Fireworks

Fireworks can cause severe injuries, including burns, eye injuries and even blindness.

"My recommendation for fireworks is to leave them to the professionals," Holmes said.

Even backyard fireworks aren't free from risk, he said, noting particularly the burn potential of sparklers, fireworks that many people consider so harmless that they allow small children to handle them.

"Sparklers burn at such a high ignition temperature, and the rod stays hot for hours," Holmes said.

"Most people way underestimate the potential for an injury from sparklers."

And again, Giles said, it's important not to assume that a child or teen knows how to be safe around fireworks.

Barbecue grills

No matter what your barbecuing pleasure—gas or charcoal—your grill ups the risk for a fire, and potential burns. Gas grills have been linked to far more fires—about 7,100 a year compared with 1,200 for charcoal, according to the National Fire Protection Association—but either type has the potential to cause a burn.

Giles said she's seen burns on children occur when people take the lid off a hot charcoal grill, set it on the ground and then return to grilling, only to have a child inadvertently touch the hot lid. Also, people don't always make sure the charcoals are put out properly when they're done grilling, and the hot coals can catch a child's attention.

"Whenever you're grilling with children around, especially children of the toddler age, supervision is

of utmost importance," she said.

Holmes also pointed out that it's crucial that you open the lid of a gas grill before you light it. Open the lid and then wait a minute or two to give any residual gas that may be lingering in the grill time to dissipate so there's no explosion when you do light the grill.

Hot surfaces

If you've ever had to run across hot sand because it felt like your feet were burning, know that they very well may have been. It's possible to burn your feet, and require treatment for those burns, from walking unprotected on sand, wooden boardwalks, concrete or asphalt that's been heating for hours in the summer sun. Simply wearing shoes, even flip-flops, should keep feet safe.

"Certain areas of the country, like Phoenix, have a major problem with asphalt burns," Holmes said.

Giles said she hasn't seen a [burn](#) from a playground in quite some time. But, if you live in an area where metal slides and other metal playground equipment are still in use, don't let kids on them in the middle of the day and test the temperature of the equipment before you let children use it, she recommended.

More information: The National Fire Protection Association has more about [preventing burns](#).

A companion article explores [grilling risks](#).

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