Burn Care Common Problems and Solutions

Burn patients have many of the same problems after leaving the hospital, such as dealing with blisters, itching, dryness, and being sensitive to the cold and sunlight. Here are some solutions to help you feel better while healing at home.

**Blisters**

**Problem:** Blisters can happen when there is pressure on the newly healed skin. This skin is thin and will thicken as it heals.

**Solution:**
- Do not wear tight clothing around the area of your wound.
- Test water temperature before showering or bathing.
- Check splints and pressure garments for tight areas causing irritation.
- Do not break the blisters. If a blister breaks, clean it with soap and water, then apply Bacitracin and a bandage.

**Itching and dryness**

**Problem:** Itching and dryness can be caused by damage to the oil making glands of your skin.

**Solution:**
- Use an anti-itch over-the-counter medicine (Benadryl, Zyrtec, or Zantac) or talk with your healthcare provider about the best option for you.
- Use lotions as often as you need them to keep your skin lubricated. Avoid lotions with perfume or alcohol.
- Try not to become sweaty. Wear loose, cool clothing. Avoid heat above 90 degrees F or humidity over 80%, if possible.
- Do not scratch newly healed skin. It is very fragile and will open easily.

**Sensitivity to sunlight**

**Problem:** Healing skin exposed to sunlight burns easier than normal skin and can blister in minutes. This sensitivity will last for about 1 year and will lessen as the skin heals.

**Solution:**
- Avoid direct sunlight, even through a car window.
- Keep newly healed areas covered with light, loose clothing while in the sun.
- Use a sunscreen with SPF of 40 or more. Types with UVA and UVB are best.
- Plan outside activities for the early morning or late evening.
- Wear a large brimmed hat while in the sunlight.
Sensitivity to cold

Problem: Healing skin is thin and nerve endings may be damaged with deeper burns. This effects how your healing skin responds to the cold. You may have tingling or may not be able to stand being in cold weather. This gets better as you heal.

Solution: • Wear warm, loose clothing in the winter.

Cuts and bruises

Problem: Healing skin is thin and will bruise or tear easily. This will happen less often as the skin heals and thickens.

Solution: • Avoid bumping into objects.
• Wear properly fitting shoes and clothes to help prevent falling.
• If you get a cut or skin tear, wash with warm water and soap. Apply a thin layer of Bacitracin and a bandage.

Discolored skin

Problem: Your skin will be a different color than usual, varying from light pink to dark brown. This is normal and will fade with time. The rate and amount of fading is different with each person. In deeper wounds, some color changes may not go away. Sun exposure can also effect color changes. No medicine or cream can prevent this.

Solution: • You may want to try make-up to even out skin tones.
• Avoid being in the sun. Wearing sunscreen will not stop color changes.

Scarring

Problem: Second and third degree burns can cause scarring. Scarring varies from person to person. It can take up to 18 months for scars to stop changing.

Solution: • Keep your joints stretched by doing exercises every day.
• You may be prescribed pressure garments. This is a tight fitting garment, such as a sleeve or a vest, that puts pressure on the scars and on the tissue underneath. Wear them as directed by your doctor.
• Massaging the area may also limit scarring. Talk to your healthcare provider about how to do that.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.

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