

Burn: Superficial (First Degree)

What is a superficial burn?

A superficial burn, the least serious type of burn, is a mild burn of the top layer of skin. It is also called a first degree burn.

What causes a superficial burn?

Superficial burns are usually caused by overexposure to the sun or very brief contact with:

- A hot object, like an iron or skillet
- Hot liquids or steam
- Flames
- Chemicals, like tile cleaners, car battery acid, drain cleaners, gasoline, wet or dry cement, lime, and chlorine
- Electricity

What are the symptoms?

Superficial burns cause:

- Pink or red area of skin
- Pain
- Mild swelling (but no blisters)

When you press on the burned area of skin, it turns white and then quickly goes back to pink. You may have some swelling or puffiness of the skin, but there are no blisters. After a few days the skin may itch and peel.

Some superficial burns, such as extensive sunburns, can also cause restlessness, headaches, and fever for a day or two.

How is it treated?

For a **burn caused by heat**, follow these steps:

- Remove jewelry or tight clothing from the burned area before the skin begins to swell.
- Flush the burn with cool running water or put cold moist cloths on the burn until there is less pain. Don't use ice or ice water, which can cause more damage to the skin.
- Use an antiseptic spray to help relieve pain and prevent infection or use an aloe cream to soothe the skin. Don't put grease, petroleum jelly, butter, or home remedies on the burn because they can make it hard for the burn to heal properly and may increase the risk of infection. Don't put any ointment on the burn unless you are instructed to do so by your healthcare provider.

- Cover the burn with a clean (sterile, if possible), dry, bandage, such as a gauze pad, if it is more comfortable for you than leaving the burn exposed. You can put tape on the gauze pad, but don't put tape on the burn itself.

For **chemical burns**, follow these first-aid steps, avoiding contact with the chemical:

- Remove right away any clothing or jewelry on which the chemical has spilled.
- Flush **liquid chemicals** from the skin thoroughly with cool running water for at least 15 minutes. Be sure to avoid splashing the chemical in your eyes. After flushing, call the Poison Control Center for advice about the specific chemical that burned you, or have someone else call while you are rinsing the chemical off. It helps to have the chemical container with you when you make the call to make sure you give the correct name for the chemical.
- Brush **dry chemicals** off the skin if large amounts of water are not available to wash the chemical off. Small amounts of water will activate some chemicals, such as lime, and cause more damage, so keep dry chemicals dry unless very large amounts of water are available. Be careful not to get any chemicals in the eyes.
- Don't try to neutralize a chemical. For example, putting an alkali chemical onto skin that has been exposed to an acid will often produce a large amount of heat and may increase the burning.
- Don't put any burn medication on skin burned by a chemical. Salves, grease, or butter may keep the chemical on the burned area, increasing exposure to the chemical.
- Don't put a bandage on the burn until you are told to do so by a healthcare provider.
- Seek emergency medical help if a chemical burn is on the face, feet, hands, groin, buttocks, or over a major joint.

For all first degree burns (including sunburn):

- Take aspirin or ibuprofen to relieve pain and inflammation, or take acetaminophen to relieve pain.
 - Check with your healthcare provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
 - Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, don't take for more than 10 days for any reason.
- Avoid wearing clothes or shoes or doing activities that rub or irritate the burned area.
- Protect the burn from pressure and friction.
- Try not to expose the burned area to extremely hot or cold temperatures.

- If you are bothered by itching, talk to your healthcare provider, who may prescribe a medicine to help.
- Get medical treatment if a burn covers more than a couple of inches of skin, especially if it is on the hands, feet, face, groin, buttocks, or a major joint, like your knee or shoulder.
- Call or see your healthcare provider if your burn does not heal in 1 week or you develop any of the following symptoms:
 - Fever over 101.5°F (38.6°C)
 - Worsening redness of the skin
 - More swelling
 - Blistering
 - Puslike drainage from the burned area

How long will the effects last?

This type of burn usually heals in 5 to 6 days. The damaged skin may peel within a few days. You will usually not have any scarring unless the burn gets infected. Do remember that blistering sunburns can cause skin cancer (melanoma) later in life.

How can I help prevent burns?

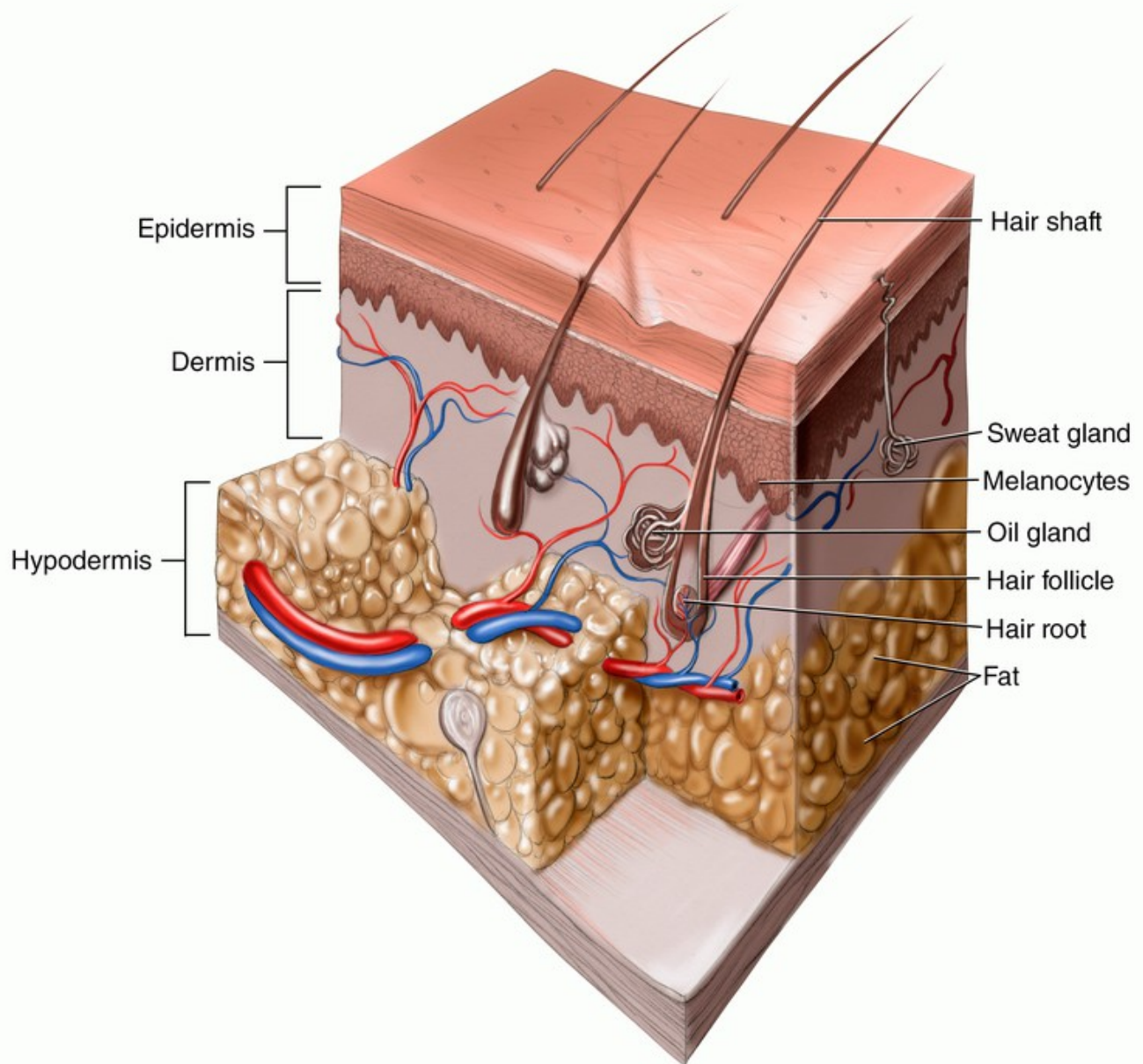
Some examples of things you can do to help prevent burns are:

- Turn your water heater setting down to 120°F (48.8°C).
- Keep pot handles turned away from the stove front.
- When you are outdoors, always use a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or greater and wear protective clothing. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB rays. It's best to put the sunscreen on your skin 30 to 60 minutes before you go out into the sun. Put on more sunscreen after water activities or if you are sweating a lot. Avoid being out in the sun for a long time, especially in the late morning and early afternoon.

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Skin: Cross Section



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