A Guide to Burns Aftercare

Introduction

This booklet has been designed to give you advice and information regarding your care after leaving hospital. It gives general guidelines about your treatment following a burn or scald and you will be advised which treatment is relevant for you.

The aim of burns aftercare is to control the amount of scarring you will have and to make you more comfortable.

If you have any queries about your care after leaving the hospital, please do not hesitate to contact us:

- Emergency Burns Assessment Clinic (EBAC)
  Tel: 01342 414010

- Burns Centre
  Tel: 01342 414440

Initial care

After your injury, the healed tissue changes, especially within the first six months after the accident. At first, the scars may look worse rather than better but then they will steadily improve over the next two years.

You will find that when you are exposed to very warm temperatures the scarring will become bright red and then dark purple when you are exposed to very cold temperatures. This is normal and occurs due to changes in the blood flow through the scar tissue. These changes will also occur on affected legs and feet if you stand for any length of time.

Washing and creaming

When you were burned or scalded, the glands that produce the skin’s natural oils were also damaged, so we need to replace these oils to keep the skin soft and supple.

The affected area(s) should be washed with baby soap three to four times daily and then the area massaged with the prescribed moisturising cream.

It is very important to ensure that the old cream is washed off, using a mild soap and water, before applying more as a build-up of cream and oil can cause blackheads and pimples.

Massaging

Massaging the affected area with the moisturiser helps reduce the tissue fluid within the scar and improves the texture and pliability of the scar. Soon after the wound has healed you will need to massage the area, using light pressure only, because the newly-healed skin is fragile and may blister or break down. The pressure you use to
massage the scars needs to be increased gradually over a few weeks. Initially, you may not like this procedure, but with patience and perseverance you will grow to tolerate and perhaps even like it.

**Pressure garments**

You may need to wear a pressure garment. These are made out of a strong, elastane material which provides firm, even pressure over the affected area. You will be measured for your own individual garment and re-measured at intervals to see if the garment needs replacing.

**How does the pressure garment help the scars?**

In burns and scalds you may find that the scar tissue becomes red, raised, firm/hard and/or itchy. This is called hypertrophic scarring. Regular creaming, massaging and the wearing of a pressure garment will control the scarring.

Compression of the burns scars alters the blood supply to the scars and changes the cells and structure of the scar tissue making them softer, flatter, paler and more supple. Pressure also relieves the itching.

**Difficulties in putting on pressure garments**

Putting on the pressure garment may be difficult initially but with practice this will very soon become much easier. Staff at the therapy clinic will show you how to apply the garment properly, as it is important that it fits correctly.

Putting a plastic bag over a hand or foot may help you to get it through the garment. The bag can be removed once the garment is on.

**Care of pressure garments**

You will be given two pressure garments: one to wash and one to wear. There are a few simple instructions you must follow to care for your garment.

Wash the garment in washing-up liquid. Do not use any solution that contains bleach, e.g. washing powders.

Do not dry on radiators or use any direct heat as this destroys the Lycra in the garment. Dry it naturally by hanging on a clothes hanger or you may use a tumble dryer, only on a cool setting. You will be given washing instructions with every garment given to you.

**How long will I have to wear a garment?**

To achieve the best results from the garment, you will wear the garment 23.5 hours out of 24 hours. It should be removed only for washing, creaming and massaging the affected area(s).

The pressure garment will become part of your life for the next couple of years and you will get used to wearing it, just like a pair of glasses or dental braces. Many adults
dislike wearing the garment, but with perseverance the results will be rewarding and well worth the effort that you have put in.

**Physical problems that may happen**

- **Areas that haven’t healed on leaving hospital**
  These areas will be dressed by EBAC. You must not get the dressings wet. If you do, please phone EBAC or the Burns Centre for advice. If wet dressings are not changed an infection can get into the wound and cause a delay in normal healing.

- **Itching**
  This is a very common problem in patients who have sustained burns or scalds and can affect both the burned area and donor areas. Unfortunately there is no magic cure but following the instructions below may give some relief:

  - Bathe in cool, not cold, water
  - Wear cotton or polyester clothing and cotton sheets to sleep in. Try to avoid pure wool or nylon as they cause you to become hot and start itching.
  - Wear the pressure garment, if prescribed, as this will reduce the itching.
  - If you find that none of these work, you can ask your doctor to prescribe some medicine that will reduce the itching.

- **Blistering**
  Small water blisters may occur if you knock yourself or sometimes pressure garments rub and cause them. This is quite common and usually stops after six months.

  Treatment - pop the blister with a cotton bud, and apply a small dry dressing. If at all concerned, please contact EBAC.

- **Skin breakdown**
  Small areas of breakdown can occur from knocks, leaving small raw areas which may require a small dressing. We can show you how to do these when at EBAC.

**Other problems you may encounter when at home:**

- **Changes in behaviour**
  Any adult who has been through a traumatic experience and spent a period of time in hospital may show changes in behaviour. This is quite common. Queen Victoria Hospital has a dedicated psychological therapy service, which you can be referred to either during treatment or after your burn injury. Staff at the Burns Centre or EBAC can arrange this for you. A separate leaflet is available on request.

- **Nightmares**
  Nightmares or flashbacks of the injury are quite common. These will lessen through time and with support. It can help to talk through any bad dreams at a
calm time the next day. If the nightmares continue you may find it helpful to talk to a member of the psychological therapy team (as above).

- **Disturbances to family life**
  Unfortunately, a burns injury can have a traumatic affect on the whole family. Often it occurs to the main wage earner which can have an effect on family life. We can try to help you with this, either by contacting the psychology department or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

**Dressings**

Sometimes the dressings, as they reduce, can be changed by the community nurses closer to home. This can be discussed with members of staff within the Burns Centre or EBAC.

**Swimming**

This activity is greatly encouraged as it provides a good form of physiotherapy but, unfortunately, cannot be undertaken until all areas are healed. The pressure garment should be removed before swimming. Afterwards, ensure that all chlorine is showered off and cream the area thoroughly.

**Sunshine**

During the first year after injury, anyone who has been burnt or scalded will not be able to tolerate the sun’s rays on their damaged skin as they may cause this delicate skin to blister. This also applies to the donor area.

Therefore, keep yourself covered with cotton clothing and if you have a facial burn or scald, a peaked cap or wide-brimmed hat should be worn when exposed to the sun.

Total sun block (e.g. SPF 50) should be used on all affected areas, including donor areas.

After the third year after the injury, you can be exposed to sunshine, ensuring you take great care by applying a suitable sun cream (e.g. factor 25) and staying out of the mid-day sun.

**Always remember ..........**

With support and reassurance, most people who have sustained any degree of burn injury eventually settle down and lead happy, well-adjusted lives.

However, if you are experiencing major problems in any of these areas, the psychologist may be able to help – the Burns Centre can provide you with further information.

**Contact details**

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<th>Burns Unit</th>
<th>Tel: 01342 414414</th>
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<tr>
<td>EBAC</td>
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<td>Burns Therapy Unit</td>
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External links

Changing Faces
The Squire Centre
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Tel 0845 4500 275
www.changingfaces.org.uk

British Association of Skin Camouflage
PO Box 3671
Chester
CH1 9QH
UNITED KINGDOM
Tel: 01254 703107
www.skin-camouflage.net

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www.redcross.org.uk

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