



Burns

Partial-Thickness Burn Education

What this handout covers

Burns can change in appearance and depth during the first several days after an injury. Integrity Wound Healing Solutions provides wound management for appropriate partial-thickness thermal burns only.

Understanding burn depth

- **Superficial burn.** Affects only the outer layer of skin (epidermis). The skin is typically red, dry, and painful without blisters. A mild sunburn is a common example.
- **Superficial partial-thickness burn.** Extends through the epidermis and into the upper portion of the dermis. The area is typically moist, red, blistered, blanching, and very painful.
- **Deep partial-thickness burn.** Extends deeper into the dermis. The wound may appear pale, red, or mottled, may be drier, and may blanch slowly or not at all. Sensation and pain may be decreased because of deeper nerve injury. These burns may require evaluation by a burn specialist.
- **Full-thickness burn.** Destroys the epidermis and the full thickness of the dermis. The surface is typically dry and leathery and may appear white, brown, or black. Pinprick sensation is decreased or absent within the full-thickness area because nerve endings have been destroyed. Full-thickness burns require specialized burn-center evaluation and are not treated by Integrity Wound Healing Solutions.

Burns we do not treat

Call 911 and seek evaluation at a burn center for:

- Full-thickness burns
- Burns involving the face, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, or throat
- Burns involving the hands or feet
- Burns over a joint
- Chemical burns
- Electrical burns or lightning injuries
- Burns caused by any source other than heat
- Suspected smoke or inhalation injury, including difficulty breathing, hoarseness, facial burns, or soot around the nose or mouth



- Any severe, extensive, rapidly worsening, or life-threatening burn

First aid for a thermal burn

- Stop the burning process and move away from the heat source.
- Remove jewelry or clothing near the burn unless it is stuck to the skin.
- Cool the burn with clean, cool running water. Do not use ice.
- Cover the area loosely with a clean, dry dressing or cloth.
- Do not apply butter, oils, toothpaste, or other home remedies.
- Do not intentionally break blisters.
- Seek medical evaluation if you are unsure about the depth, severity, or appropriate treatment of the burn.

While your partial-thickness burn is healing

- **Protect your dressing.** Keep it in place, clean, and dry unless your wound management provider gives you different instructions.
- **Protect healed skin from the sun.** Newly healed skin is sensitive to ultraviolet exposure. Follow your provider's recommendations for clothing and sunscreen once the area has healed.

Remember

Burn depth can evolve. A burn that initially appears superficial may prove to be deeper with time. When in doubt, seek medical evaluation.

When to call us right away

- Increasing redness, swelling, or pain
- New or increasing drainage, or an odor from the burn
- Fever or chills
- A burn that becomes darker or appears deeper

Sources

- American Burn Association. (2025). Guidelines for Burn Patient Referral.
- American Burn Association. Burn First Aid.
- American Burn Association. Burn Care Procedures.