

VENICE PLASTIC SURGERY

A.E. HAAS, M.D.

Cosmetic, Reconstructive, Face, Breast, and Hand Surgery

Wounds - Burns

Burn wounds are some of the worst types of injuries a person can sustain. They are divided into thermal, electrical and chemical burns. Each one of these is a topic by themselves. For severe cases the patients are usually sent to specialty burn wound centers such as in Tampa or Gainesville. Other patients may be treated in our own wound center. Let me discuss thermal or heat related injuries.

Heating system and kitchen related fires are the most common causes of thermal injuries. Then comes injuries related to smoking cigarettes and starting fires. Burns from appliances and tools and hot water are common. Many infants are placed into wash tubs of what is thought to be luke warm water but in fact burns the thin skin of babies.

Just a few minutes of contact with 120 degree water will cause a severe burn. A few seconds is all it takes at 130 degrees and a single second at around 150 degrees, the temperature at which many people set their hot water heaters. Many people keep the temperature high on the heaters to kill bacteria while washing clothes or washing the dishes. Germs can withstand much higher temperatures. It takes super heated steam that is 5 times more powerful than water at the same temperature to kill bacteria. It must be under pressure as in a medical autoclave sterilizer. Set your heater to 120 degrees, certainly no more than 130 at most.

What happens when you are exposed to hot water or grease? The result is dead skin. Remember that your skin is the only layer of protection of your body. It keeps the bacteria and germs out. They like to grow on dead burned skin. One problem with burned skin is that the nerve endings may be injured and the wound may not be very painful. The patient does not think they have a bad burn. Treatment is delayed and recovery takes longer.

First aid starts with removing the person from the area of injury if possible. Call 911 for anything that seems even remotely severe. Apply room temperature water to the area. Sometimes a wet washcloth or towel is all that is needed. Do not apply heat or ice. These can only increase the injury. Do not put any ointment, peroxide, rubbing alcohol or iodine on the area. Use nothing besides plain room temperature water. Seek medical attention.

The most important thing to me is that even a small burn is probably worse than you think. It should be examined by a doctor. If you have other medical conditions it is even more important to get a professional opinion. This is especially true for those with impaired circulation, people with diabetes or other chronic diseases.

**The above represents the opinion of A. E. Haas, M.D.
Venice Plastic Surgery, Venice Wound Center, Lakeside Medical Center**

Just call us directly. No referral needed unless required by your insurance company

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