

Burn care at home



**Ascension
Columbia St. Mary's
Hospital**

Table of contents

Burn care at home	1
Signs and symptoms of infection	1
Washing the burns	2
Applying the bandages	2
Lubricating the healed areas	3
Taking care of blisters	3
That annoying itch	3
Eating the right amount	4
Exercising at home	4
Pressure garments	5
Comfortable clothes	5
Weather	5
Returning to work	6
Psychological distress	6
A note from your nurses	7
Resources available for burn victims and family members	8
Important telephone numbers	8
Notes and questions	9

This booklet has been developed by the nursing staff and the Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy Departments of Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital — Milwaukee Campus. Every attempt has been made to provide you with the information that you will need to care for your healed and unhealed burns at home.

Please read the following pages. Once you have read this information, your nurse will review it with you and answer any questions that you may have.

Burn care at home

Most burn patients do not stay in the hospital until all their burns are healed. Once the open areas become small enough that your doctor, your nurse, and you feel that they can be managed at home, plans will be made to prepare you for discharge. Not everyone needs a nurse to change his or her bandages. If you can reach the areas, you can do it yourself. You have watched your nurses change your bandages and care for your healing burns. You know more than you realize. Follow the guidelines as well as any instructions from your doctor and you should do well.

If you are not comfortable doing it yourself, ask a close friend or relative who is willing to help. We would gladly show them how to properly apply your bandages. He or she must watch your dressing change at least once and must be able to show your nurse that they can do the dressing change correctly. This may also help to answer questions that might arise after you are at home. The more you know about your newly healed skin, the more comfortable you will feel about caring for yourself at home.

If you are unable to apply your bandages because of the location of the burn and do not have a close friend or relative to assist you, the hospital's Social Work Service Department may be able to help you find a home care nursing agency in your area. The agency assigned will be provided with information on how to care for your burns to make your adjustment at home as easy as possible.

Signs and symptoms of infection

You will want to watch for the following:

- An increase in redness of the burn or the surrounding area
- Swelling
- Increasing pain
- Fever — temperature greater than 100°
- An increase in the amount of drainage from your open areas that can be colored white, green or yellow
- A foul odor coming from your open areas

If you have any of these symptoms, it is important to consult your doctor. Ignoring any of these signs or symptoms can result in bigger health concerns.

Washing the burns

- Take a shower every day if dressings allow.
- Use a separate, clean washcloth for open areas. You can wash/dry washcloths to re-use.
- Use a mild liquid soap such as Dial or Ivory. Bar soap may be hard to use and keep clean.
- Avoid soap products that contain perfume or alcohol.
- Wash off all of the old cream or ointment.
- Allow area to air out for an hour.
- Reapply new prescribed cream or ointment and dressings/bandages.
- Your shower area or tub should be cleaned daily or before and after you bathe if other members of your household are using the same area.

REMEMBER: Keeping your open areas clean is the best way to avoid infection.

Applying the bandages

- Your nurse will instruct you on the preparation of your bandages.
- A variety of bandages and ointments or creams may be used. Please use the bandages, ointments and creams prescribed to you. Using other materials that have not been approved could damage or worsen your wounds.
- Bandages should be changed once a day at the time of your bath or shower, unless you are instructed otherwise.
- It is not necessary for you to wear gloves when preparing your bandages. Gloves will be sent home with you if a friend, relative or visiting nurse is assisting you.
- Use a clean scissors for cutting the gauze. Wash scissors daily with soap and water or rubbing alcohol. It is not necessary to purchase special scissors.

Lubricating the healed areas

- Once wounds are completely healed, you may be told to apply oil-based creams or lotions, e.g. cocoa butter, Eucerin, or Curel.
- Read labels of any over-the-counter product purchased. Avoid products that are alcohol-based or contain perfumes. These products may be drying and not lubricating.
- Liberally apply lotion or ointment to healed areas after you shower.
- Reapply products as prescribed when absorbed or when necessary.

Taking care of blisters

Your newly healed skin is fragile and may blister easily. When these small water blisters appear, do the following:

- Do not break them open.
- If blisters do break, keep them clean and dry.
- If wearing pressure garments, apply a small piece of non-adherent dressing to the open area and apply garments as usual.
- Telfa is a non-adherent dressing pad that can be purchased at most drug stores. Multiple individual packages come in each box.

That annoying itch

Itching is common as skin heals. You may do the following to control itching:

- Apply lotion liberally to healed areas after showering.
- Take the “itch” pills that your doctor prescribed. If you did not receive a prescription, contact your doctor. The “itch” pill may be called Benadryl or Atarax.

Not recommended:

- Do not scratch the area that itches. Your new skin is fragile and can be damaged easily.
- Do not soak in a hot bath.

Eating the right amount

While in the hospital, the dietitian talked to you about the importance of eating a high-calorie, high-protein diet. Please remember the following guidelines once you are home:

- Your body continues to need extra calories until all areas are healed.
Examples: meat, peanut butter, nuts, dairy, legumes, tofu, eggs, protein shakes, yogurt, ice cream, cheese, etc.
- Cutting back on your diet and attempting to lose weight while you heal will slow down the healing process.
- Return to a well-balanced diet of average portions once you are completely healed.

Exercising at home

In order to prevent stiffness, tightness, and loss of mobility, you will need to continue to exercise at home. You may or may not need physical therapy at an outpatient clinic or at a hospital in your area. Need for outpatient therapy will depend on the extent and location of the injury, and your motivation. Both of these will be evaluated prior to your discharge. In either case, there are things you will want to do at home:

- Exercise every day. Your therapists can recommend specific exercises and/or provide you with adaptive devices.
- Return to your normal level of activity around the house as you are able.
- Use moderation — do not overdo.
- Please consult your therapist or doctor prior to your normal workout routine or strenuous activities. Public gyms may harbor extra germs your skin will be susceptible to.

Pressure garments

If you were injured from a full thickness burn or are prone to scarring, your doctor will order a pressure garment for you to wear over the affected area. You will be specially measured for this garment by the physical or occupational therapist. You may need to come back and pick it up. When used correctly, these garments have been found to be extremely effective in decreasing the scarring associated with burn wounds.

Things that you need to know about pressure garments are:

- Pressure garments are most effective during the first 12 to 18 months as scar tissue matures.
- The garment should be worn 24/7. The only time the garments should be off is for showering.
- As you heal and your swelling recedes in the areas of your burn, the garments may start to fit loosely. Please contact the Burn Unit to be refitted or mention your concern at your next clinic appointment.

Comfortable clothes

As you know, your newly healed skin is fragile. To avoid trauma to the affected areas, please follow these guidelines:

- Avoid tight-fitting clothes or those made of rough, stiff fabrics (example: jeans).
- Wear loose-fitting, soft garments, such as sweatpants, sweatshirts, basketball shorts, workout clothes.

Weather

- For the first year after your injury, protect your newly healed skin from the sun. Wear a hat to shield your face and loose, cool clothing to cover limbs, use sunscreen SPF 30-50, and avoid being outside during the hottest part of the day (noon-4 p.m.).
- If you have open burns, avoid swimming in public pools or any body of water.
- In winter, dress in warm clothing to prevent frostbite damage to new, fragile skin.

Returning to work

Only you know what your job entails and what your limitations are. It is OK to ask for a modified schedule at first to ease back into a normal routine. Hitting the ground running right away may be stressful and too demanding. You will need to honestly discuss what you think is best with your doctor. When the two of you feel that you are ready, you will be given a return-to-work slip.

If you were injured at work, stay in touch with your case manager. He or she will be able to assist you and answer any questions you may have.

Don't be alarmed if your work asks for a physical or some sort of assessment through occupational health. The company may be making sure you will be able to perform your duties safely.

Have a conversation with your manager/boss if your working conditions are unsanitary or your duties require you to work in unclean areas, as this may affect your healing.

Psychological distress

Psychological distress may occur as soon as the injury happens and may last for some time. It is important to be as open as possible about these feelings while staying in the hospital and once you go home. These feelings may include:

- Hopelessness
- Anger, anxiety
- That you're not the same person
- People won't accept the "new" you
- Difficulty sleeping
- Replaying the accident in your mind, preventing you from going about everyday activities
- And many more

Just remember that you're neither the first nor the last person to feel different after an accident. Consult with family, a nurse, doctor, or come to the Burn Support Group. There are many ways to cope with or improve these feelings. The correct resolution just needs to be found for you as an individual.

A note from your nurses

Discharge from the hospital should be a joyous event. You may not feel that way right now. You may be afraid to go home. You may be worried about how your burns will heal or if the bandages will be applied correctly. These are common concerns for many burn patients. Your care team will answer all of your questions before you leave. If you get home and find that you have additional questions, write them down so you can ask your doctor. If you have a concern that can't wait until your first visit, feel free to call the Burn Unit. Remember, healing takes time and your questions and concerns should be addressed.

Additional note: Please ask your nurse for information about the Burn Support Group. This is a group of burn victims and their families that gather together at various times throughout the year. There may be a support group in your area. Many patients have found it helpful to talk to others who have survived burns and have obtained helpful information on dealing with everyday life.

Resources available for burn victims and family members

Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors

Email: info@phoenix-society.org

Website: phoenix-society.org

6026 Kalamazoo Ave., SE, #221

Kentwood, MI 49508

The Professional Firefighters of Wisconsin Charitable Foundation

Burn Survivor Support Program

Burn Camp (Ages 7-17)

Office phone: 608-630-8440

321 E. Main St., Suite 200

Madison, WI 53703

Survivors Offering Assistance in Recovery (SOAR)

Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital - Milwaukee Campus

2301 N. Lake Drive, Milwaukee, WI 53211

Phone: 414-585-1163

Important telephone numbers

Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital — Milwaukee Campus: 414-585-1000

Burn Unit: 414-585-1163

Physical and Occupational Therapy: 414-585-1066

Outpatient Burn Clinic: 414-585-1243

Your doctor is: _____

Office location: _____

Office telephone: _____

Office doctors: _____

Office location: _____

Office telephone: _____



Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital

**Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital —
Milwaukee Campus**
2301 N. Lake Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53211

**Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital —
Ozaukee Campus**
13111 N. Port Washington Road
Mequon, WI 53097

**Ascension Columbia St. Mary's —
Women's Medical Center**
2323 N. Lake Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53211

**Ascension Sacred Heart
Rehabilitation Hospital**
13111 N. Port Washington Road
Second Floor
Mequon, WI 53097

ascension.org

© Ascension 2024. All images, photos, text and other materials are subject to copyrights owned by Ascension, or other individuals or entities which are used with their permission, and are protected by United States copyright laws. Any reproduction, retransmission, distribution or republication of all or part of any images, photos, text, and other materials is expressly prohibited without the express written approval and under the approved format of Ascension. MASCWI-4540 636866