

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Ouch! Tips on taking care of sunburned skin this summer

A sunburn is skin damage from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. Most sunburns cause mild pain and redness but affect only the outer layer of skin. These are called first-degree burns. The red skin might hurt when you touch it. These sunburns are mild and can usually be treated at home. Skin that is red and painful and that swells up and blisters may mean that deep skin layers and nerve endings have been damaged. These are second-degree burns. This type of sunburn is usually more painful and takes longer to heal.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Use cool cloths on the sunburned areas.
- Take cool showers or baths often.
- Apply soothing lotions with aloe vera to sunburned areas. Do not apply lotions to blistered skin.
- A sunburn can cause a mild fever and a headache. Lie down in a cool, quiet room to relieve the headache. A headache may be caused by not getting enough fluids, which is called dehydration, so drinking fluids may help.
- Take anti-inflammatory medicines to reduce pain, swelling, and fever. These include ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve). Read and follow all instructions on the label.
- Use lotion to relieve the itching when your skin peels. There is nothing you can do to stop skin from peeling after a sunburn. It is part of the healing process.
- Protect your skin from the sun with sunscreen, hats with wide brims, sunglasses, and loose-fitting, tightly woven clothing that covers your arms and legs.

Caring for blisters

Small blisters usually heal on their own.

- Do not try to break the blisters. Just leave them alone.
- Do not cover the blisters unless something such as clothing is rubbing against them. If you do cover them, apply a loose bandage. You can use tape to hold the bandage on, but do not let the tape touch the blisters.
- Avoid wearing clothes or shoes or doing activities that rub or irritate the blisters until they have healed.

Larger blisters, which are the size of a nickel or larger, usually heal without problems.

- If you have a large blister, you can consider draining it, unless your doctor told you not to. Clean a needle with rubbing alcohol or soap and water, then use it to gently puncture the edge of the blister. Press the fluid in the blister toward the hole you made. Wash the blister after you have drained it, and pat it dry with clean gauze.
- Do not remove the flap of skin covering the blister unless it tears or gets dirty or pus forms under it. The flap protects the healing skin underneath.
- Put a thin layer of petroleum jelly on the bandage before you apply it. This will keep the bandage from sticking to the blister. Do not use alcohol or iodine on the blister because these may make the blister heal more slowly.
- Loosely apply a bandage or gauze. You can use tape to hold the bandage on, but do not let the tape touch the blister. Do not wrap tape completely around a hand, arm, foot, or leg because it could cut off the blood supply if the limb swells. If the tape is too tight, you may develop numbness, tingling, pain, or cool and pale or swollen skin below the tape.
- Change the bandage every day and any time it gets wet or dirty. You can soak the bandage in cool water just before removing it to make it less painful to take off.
- Avoid wearing clothes or shoes or doing activities that rub or irritate the blisters until they have healed.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor or 811 now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have signs of needing more fluids. You have sunken eyes, a dry mouth, and you pass only a little urine.
- You have signs of infection, such as:
 - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
 - Red streaks leading from the area.
 - Pus draining from the area.
 - A fever.