After a Burn: A Checklist of What to Do and What to Keep

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Take care of the burn first, then protect the evidence. This checklist covers the first hours and the first weeks after a burn caused by someone else: first aid as the National Library of Medicine describes it, when a burn center is the right place, and the records and objects that decide whether a claim can be proven later. Print it or save it as a PDF.

In the first minutes

- ☐ Call 911 for a serious burn. MedlinePlus says to call if the burn is about the size of your palm or larger, if it is a full-thickness burn, or if you are not sure how serious it is (MedlinePlus (https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000030.htm)).
- ☐ For a minor burn with unbroken skin, run cool water over it or soak it in cool water, not ice water, for at least 5 to 30 minutes (MedlinePlus (https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000030.htm)).
- ☐ Do not put oil, butter, ice, cream or home remedies on a severe burn, do not break blisters, and do not pull off clothing that is stuck to the skin (MedlinePlus (https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000030.htm)).
- ☐ If electricity may have caused the burn, do not touch the person directly; use a non-metallic object to separate them from the wire first (MedlinePlus (https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000030.htm)).

Ask about a burn center

The American Burn Association lists the burns that should be referred to a burn center, including burns of the face, hands, feet, genitals and major joints, full-thickness burns, electrical and chemical burns, and burns with inhalation injury (ABA referral guidelines (https://ameriburn.org/burnreferral)). If your burn fits, ask the emergency doctor about a transfer. Our burn center directory (beverlylaw.org/burn-injury-lawyer/burn-centers/) lists the centers in California, Texas and Washington.

The same day

- ☐ Photograph the burn, the place it happened and anything involved: the cup and lid, the heater, the appliance, the wiring, the chemical container, the car.
- ☐ Keep the object that burned you. Put it in a bag or box and do not clean, repair or throw it away. A loose lid or a failed part can show exactly what went wrong.
- ☐ Write down names and phone numbers of witnesses and of any employee or manager you spoke with.

- ☐ Keep the receipt, the app order, the work order or the lease. They show where and when it happened and who was in charge.
- ☐ Ask the business, landlord or employer to write up an incident report, and ask for a copy.

The first week

- ☐ Ask in writing that video be kept. Store and drive-thru cameras can record over footage on short cycles. Our preservation letter template (beverlylaw.org/burn-injury-lawyer/evidence-preservation-letter/) shows what to ask for.
- ☐ Photograph the burn every day for two weeks, with a ruler or coin for scale.
- ☐ Keep every bill, prescription, mileage note and missed-work record in one folder.
- ☐ Do not give a recorded statement to an insurance company before you talk with a lawyer.
- ☐ Check your deadline with our deadline calculator (beverlylaw.org/burn-injury-lawyer/deadline-calculator/). Claims against a city, county, state agency or public hospital can have much shorter notice periods.

As treatment goes on

- ☐ Keep a short journal: pain, sleep, dressing changes, therapy, what you can no longer do.
- ☐ Save the names of every doctor, therapist and clinic, and the dates of each visit.
- ☐ Ask your doctors what grafts, scar care or later surgery they expect. Those future costs are part of a burn claim.

Talk to a burn injury lawyer

Beverly Law offers a free case review in English or Spanish at (310) 552-6959. You owe no fees or costs unless we win. Read more on our burn injury lawyer (beverlylaw.org/burn-injury-lawyer/) page.

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