

How to Treat a Sunburn

- **Symptoms:** redness, swelling, pain, blisters, fever, chills, and dry, itchy peeling skin
 - Symptoms begin 2-4 hours after exposure, peak at 24 hours, skin peels at 3-7 days.
 - Sensations of pain and heat generally last 48 hours.
- **Oral Treatments**
 - Take ibuprofen (Advil) or Tylenol immediately, and for two days; may relieve some symptoms. Aspirin can be taken by adults but not children under 18 years (may lead to Reyes Syndrome).
 - Drink plenty of fluids to rehydrate your system.
 - A severe burn may require oral steroids especially if swelling is excessive or the burn is on the face and neck.
- **Topical Treatments**
 - Use nonprescription 1.0% hydrocortisone cream as soon as possible to decrease pain/swelling; apply 3 times a day for the first two days unless you have open sores.
 - Apply cool wet compresses to the skin. Chill washcloths in the refrigerator.
 - Use bath products containing oatmeal (Aveeno) to relieve itching.
 - Avoid soap, it can be drying.
 - Take a cool (not cold) bath; showering is okay unless it is too painful.
 - Topical moisturizing creams with aloe or calamine help rehydrate and soothe skin.
 - If skin is broken from open blisters or dry cracks, use an antibiotic ointment on these sites, not a moisturizer or hydrocortisone as these may lead to infection.
 - Avoid applying petrolatum, other ointments or butter – they block sweat glands and prevent heat escaping from the skin.
 - First aid creams or topical anesthetic medications containing benzocaine or diphenhydramine should not be used due to possible irritation or allergic skin reaction.
 - May use non-sensitizing topical anesthetic creams that contain menthol, camphor or praxomine to relieve itching.
- **Home Remedies (may be helpful, but controlled studies are lacking)**
 - Compresses can be soaked in a solution of 1 cup skim milk to 4 cups water (refrigerated) and then applied to skin.
 - Adding vinegar (2 cups, white or apple cider) or baking soda (2 oz.) to bath water may help. Vinegar in a wet compress may be applied directly to skin unless it is open.
- **General Treatments**
 - Swelling is most severe in the first 24-48 hours. Elevate burned body parts if possible. Sleep on two pillows if face is burned.
 - Do not peel off dried skin before the skin beneath is healed, this may lead to scarring.
 - Wear no pajamas or wear them inside out to prevent chafing from seams.
 - Heat exhaustion or heat stroke may accompany a severe sunburn especially in children and the elderly.
 - Keep the burned skin out of the sun until it heals. Burning a sunburn will lead to scarring and possibly skin cancer. Wear protective clothing if outside before healing.
- **Call a Doctor**
 - If a sunburn is accompanied by a fever $>102^{\circ}$, large numbers of blisters, severe pain, excessive swelling, fainting, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or if child is less than 1 year.