

Itching



One of the most common complaints heard from burn survivors is about the itchiness that comes with healing. Itching can become such a problem that it begins to interfere with important elements of healing, such as sleep and exercise. Let's talk about the causes and solutions other burn survivors have found to help soothe their itchy skin.

Causes

Itchiness while healing is not just limited to the burn but also often occurs at the donor site. Itching and healing after a burn injury go hand in hand and while the itch cannot be completely prevented, there are known causes such as dryness, dehydration, medications, sun exposure, and scratching a wound. To help stop itching or lower the severity, the first line of defense is preventing what you can—stay hydrated, stay out of the sun or cover up outdoors, and resist scratching whenever possible.

Treatments

Lotions, Creams, and Oils – Over-the-counter products are the most common treatments to help with itching skin. Suggestions that survivors share are to get unscented lotions; get sample or travel-size bottles so you are able to try different types; don't just stick to body lotions—some survivors had more success with hand or face lotions; apply regularly in a preventative manner rather than a reactive manner; massage lotions in with light pressure.

Survivor-Recommended Products – Surveying burn survivors, asking which lotions worked best to maintain their healed burn scars, these products were reported the most favorably: Eucerin, Bio-Oil, CeraVe for Dry Skin, Lubriderm, Nivea, Cocoa Butter/Coconut Oil, Cetaphil, and Aquaphor. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. What may work for one survivor may not work for others, so we recommend trying samples to see what works for you and brings the most relief.

Medications – Always consult with your doctor before adding medications to your routine, as some medications interfere with or counteract each other and should not be taken together. Oral antihistamines such as Benadryl are the most common medications to help with itching. These medications can be helpful in battling itchy skin but dosage and regularity must be discussed with a doctor. Other helpful options for some survivors are sleeping aids. If itching is disrupting your sleep patterns, discuss this with your doctor. Prescription-medicated lotions might also help reduce itching.

Other Tips

Water – Warm (not hot) baths or showers may help reduce itching by helping exfoliate dry and dead skin. Different burn survivors say different temperatures work best for them so experiment to find what works best for you.

Cold compresses – When bathing is not possible, a cold compress on an especially itchy area can greatly reduce the intensity. This may be most helpful during the summer months.

Patting – Patting—not scratching—with a flat hand or fist may help soothe the itch. Scratching may help in the short term but will likely extend the healing time and therefore the itching. Often, scratching does not happen on purpose, so keeping nails short can help prevent accidental scratches.

Pressure Garments – May help with itching severity and help prevent accidental scratching.



For any additional questions or support navigating any of the resources listed above, please contact AARBF:

Phone: 800-242-BURN * Website: AARBF.org * Email: Info@aarbf.org