AS TIME GOES BY

After going home, recovery issues will be different. This section addresses some of those issues.

APPEARANCE OF WOUNDS

As the healing process continues the burn sites, grafted areas and donor sites will change in color and texture. The period of scar "maturation" takes 6-18 months, but can last longer. Genetic dispositions, burn depth, size, age, and anatomic location are factors that affect scar formation and maturation.

Often arms or legs will become red or purple if they are in a dependent position. This is because the blood vessels in the burned areas have been disrupted. Circulation will improve over time. With time these colors tend to revert back to a color similar to the original color of the skin. It may never return completely to the original color of the pre-burned skin. Try to avoid standing for long periods of time, walking helps circulation by muscle contraction. When sitting put your feet up and rest your hands and arms on pillows. Try to gently rub the scar with moisturizing lotion multiple times a day. Rub along the direction of the scar as well as in a circular motion. This will help “soften” the scar and will retard contracture formation. This is particularly important when the scar has formed over a joint. If the scar continues to form hard, though skin over a joint it may lead to a limitation of motion at that joint and eventually require operative correction. A hypertrophic scar or keloid is a special type of scar that is more difficult to control. The skin becomes very raised and discolored, usually a reddened to purple looking scar. Compressions garments are best suited for these scars; however, they may not stop the scarring process.

There are several ways to treat scars:

**Pressure.** This comes in the form of pressure garments, ace wraps, Coban® (an elastic wrap that is self-sticking) and other materials. Sometimes these are used with silicone inserts.

**Massage.** This may help the scar become soft and flexible. Place your thumb or finger over a part of the scar and apply as much pressure as possible. Then, move your thumb or finger around in circles without changing the point of contact with the skin, still applying the same pressure. You should be able to move the scar over the tissue that is underneath. This should be a deeper massage than when you apply moisturizing lotion. Scars over joints can be minimized with aggressive exercise. If the scar is severe and function is affected, a surgical “release” may be needed.
HOW TO USE AND CARE FOR PRESSURE GARMENTS

Pressure garments are worn 23 hours a day. They should be worn at all times except when bathing. You will have two sets so one can be washed while you are wearing the other.

Pressure garments are designed to be snug but not tight. They can be a challenge to put on. Applying a small amount of cornstarch may make the application easier.

Hand wash pressure garments with mild soap or detergent. Let them air dry. Do not put them in the dryer. This ruins the elastic. Treat them with care.
Do not alter your garment in any way. Contact the Burn Center staff if they are too loose or too tight. The clinic staff will give you an appointment to have them altered.

Not all patients will require all of these interventions.

New skin and skin grafts are fragile. Sometimes small blisters form in the healing areas, this may be a normal part of the skin remolding itself.

Wearing loose fitting, natural (breathable) clothing and protecting your new skin from trauma can help with this.
Healing burns, grafts and donor sites have special needs for moisturizers. Some things to consider:

Apply moisturizers several times a day. Massage the lotion in, don’t apply too much. Do not use lotions with alcohol as it can be drying. Avoid heavily perfumed lotions which may be irritating. Suggestions of products that are available include Lubriderm, Aquaphor and Eucerin Cream. The important point here is that they have no perfume in them. Perfume uses alcohol as the vehicle to “package” the perfume and that will irritate your skin. You can go to your pharmacy and pick up generic lotions similar to ones mentioned. Just ask for help and you will see your choices!

Use sun block SPF-30 for children if they are going to be exposed to sunlight. Reapply frequently while outside. Always wear a hat to protect your skin. If you arms or legs were burned why not wear long pants and a long sleeve shirt for 6 to 12 months so that it is not exposed to the sun and it is protected from small scrapes and bruises that normally occur.

**WHAT TO DO ABOUT ITCHING**

Itching is a normal part of the healing process. It will eventually fade away over time. The length of time will depend upon a combination of factors such as the depth and size of the burn, location of the burn and how fast you heal. The itching can be intense and frustrating, but it will pass. An important fact to remember is not to itch with your fingernails as you might injury the healing skin and create a bigger problem. If you must itch take a light cloth and gently brush it over the area of itching. Here are some key points to help you with this problem:

- Keep your skin moisturized following the directions above.
- Wearing pressure garments or other pressure devices can help with itching. If you are not required to wear pressure garments wear loose fitting clothes until the burn wounds have healed. The entire healing process takes between 6 and 12 months for the skin to reach its maximal healing.
- Apply topical medicines as advised by the burn staff.
- Over the counter or prescription histamine blockers may be needed. Any medications that have been prescribed for the itching should be taken. Don’t wait for the itching to “get a hold of you” as it is more difficult to stop once it reaches that state of intense itching.
- Bathing helps remove dry skin that can cause itching. When you bath, dab yourself dry rather than wipe as this might start up the itching process. Also the moist skin tends to be fragile and wiping may injure the healing skin.
- Avoid getting hot and sweaty. During the summer months you may find a fan helpful to gently blow over your skin.
- Application of cold, for example a cool cloth, may help.
• Keep your fingernails short so you don't damage your fragile skin. Sometimes wearing cotton gloves will act a reminder not to scratch.

Remember it is not a question of if the itching will stop, but when the itching will stop…and it will stop!

BATHING

If there are restrictions on bathing, the burn staff will tell you. If you have wound care that needs to be done at home, during bathing is usually the easiest time to do it. Allow extra time for bathing and take your pain medicine at least 30 minutes before if you are going to do wound care.

Some considerations:
• Carefully test water temperature.
• Use a clean washcloth each time you bathe.
• If you are instructed to soak off your bandages then do a little each day and it will come off with time.
• Use gentle soap without perfume or deodorant.
• Use gentle shampoos (no dandruff shampoos).
• Dab or pat yourself dry with a cotton towel rather than wiping yourself dry.
• Don’t stay in the shower or tube for long periods of time. The “dish pan hand” look that everyone gets from being in the water for long periods of time is detrimental to you burn healing.
• For males with facial burns it is usually better to keep clean shaven while the burn is healing rather than letting the facial hair just grow. Use plenty of shaving cream and a sharp razor and take your time. A potential complication of letting the facial hair grow is that an infection at the base of the hair follicles may develop which may require antibiotics.
• Use rubber gloves when cleaning the tub to avoid contact with chemicals.

TEMPERATURE

The temperature controlling mechanisms of the skin may have been damaged from your burn; you should avoid extremes of temperatures. Plan ahead so you will not be too hot or cold. This often improves with time, but in some cases doesn’t and requires lifestyle changes.

EXERCISE

You may notice that you tire more easily than you used to, this is a normal part of burn recovery. Your energy level will increase with time.
It is normal to feel joint stiffness and skin tightness. Skin tightness changes over time. Joints can become tight with inactivity.

Dealing with stiff joints:
- Do as many normal activities as possible for yourself (like eating, combing your hair, brushing your teeth, etc.) You may need adaptive devices to help you with this.
- Do not let family and friends do things for you that you can do for yourself. This will delay full recovery.
- To prevent joint contractures you must stretch and exercise to a point of some discomfort. Take your pain medicine before starting your exercises.
- Sometimes a splint will need to be worn to help prevent contracture. Occupational therapy will help you with splints.

You do not need to stay home if you feel well enough to go out. Avoid activities that would get your wounds dirty or cause trauma to your healing skin.

**RELATIONSHIPS**

Many people who are injured in fires are worried that their injuries will make them less attractive to existing or potential partners. If you are in a close relationship, the relationship is bound to be somewhat affected by the trauma you and your partner have experienced.

Feelings about resuming sexual relations may vary. There may be issues with pain, body image, and diminished sex drive. It is best to discuss these with your partner. Try to be open and honest about what hurts and what feels good.

If you don’t have a partner, it may seem an intimate relationship will never materialize. Remember that true and loving relationships are not based on surface appearance. Sharing like interest, humor and experiences is the foundation for a relationship. True intimacy is achieved through friendship first; a more intimate relationship may follow.

**BURN SURVIVOR TIPS**

- Wear your pressure garments 23 hours out of a 24-hour day. The benefits of doing so makes any challenges of discomfort disappear.
- Always wear a hat while outdoors.
- When traveling during the daylight hours bring a soft cotton pillowcase to protect extremities from heat.
- During your initial recovery, clothes that are 100 percent cotton, loose fitting and without ties or buttons are the most comfortable.
BEING PREPARED

Your new skin is fragile and minor knocks or scratches may cause bleeding. Having an emergency aid kit when away from home may be helpful. A simple plastic bag with 2x2's, gauze and a roll of tape is all that is needed.