

Fact Sheet

## Burn Pain

### About

According to the American Burn Association, an estimated 450,000 burn injuries receive medical treatment each year.<sup>1</sup> A burn injury is one of the most painful injuries a person can endure, and the subsequent wound debridement required to heal a burn injury is often more painful than the initial injury.<sup>2</sup>

“Pain resulting from burn injuries can be challenging to treat because burns differ in their types and severity.”

Burn pain is difficult to control because of its unique characteristics, its changing patterns, and its various components. In addition, there is pain involved in the treatment of burns as the wounds must be cleansed and the dressings

changed. Studies have found that the management of burn pain can be inadequate, and have recommended more aggressive treatment for pain resulting from burns.<sup>3</sup>

Pain resulting from burn injuries can be challenging to treat because burns differ in their types and severity. There are three types of burns:<sup>3</sup>

- First-degree burns are considered mild compared to other burns. They result in pain and reddening of the epidermis (outer layer of the skin).
- Second-degree burns affect the epidermis and the dermis (lower layer of skin). They cause pain, redness, swelling, and blistering.
- Third-degree burns go through the dermis and affect deeper tissues. They result in white or blackened, charred skin that might be numb.

### Facts

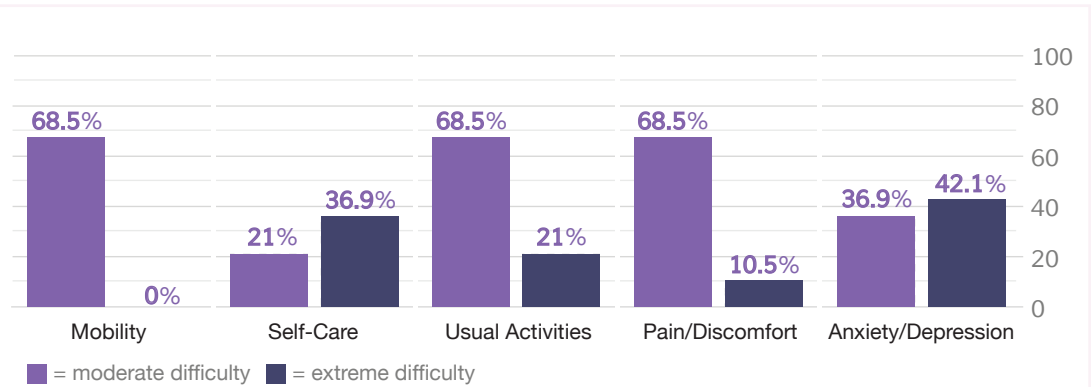
The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) states that burn pain management is deficient in elderly patients and in the vast population (about 95% of all burn injuries) treated on an outpatient basis.<sup>4</sup>

IASP cites challenges surrounding the treatment of burn pain based on lack of research, the unique nature and characteristics of burns, and complexities surrounding secondary pain from wound care.<sup>4</sup>

An international wound care survey on pain and trauma at wound dressing changes found that dressing removal was considered by practitioners to be the time of greatest perceived pain.<sup>5</sup>

Not only is acute burn injury pain a source of immense suffering, but it has been linked to debilitating chronic pain and stress-related disorders.<sup>6</sup>

Burn patients experience severe procedural pain and mild-to-moderate background pain; one study also found that burn patients experience anxiety, fatigue, helplessness, anorexia and acute stress disorder associated with background pain.<sup>7</sup>



One study of 50 patients who had been admitted to the ICU with severe (third-degree) burns found that after one year, the **level of health** of all survivors was worse than before the injury. Problems reported include: difficulty with mobility (moderate 68.5%; extreme 0%), self-care (moderate 21%; extreme 36.9%), usual activities (moderate 68.5%; extreme 21%), pain/discomfort (moderate 68.5%; extreme 10.5%), anxiety/depression (moderate 36.9%; extreme 42.1%).<sup>8</sup>

## Additional Resources

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### American Burn Association

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**The Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors, Inc.**

1835 R W Berends Dr. SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49519-4955  
Phone: (800)-888-2876  
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**World Burn Foundation / Burn Survivors Online**

9663 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 792  
Beverly Hills, CA 90210  
Phone: (310) 858-1717  
[www.burnfoundation.com](http://www.burnfoundation.com)

Resources verified July 2011.

## References

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