Itchy Skin After Burn Injury

Jessica recently got a burn injury on her arm. As her burn healed, it started to itch. This can happen to a burn that has healed by itself or with grafted skin and donor skin sites. The medical name for itchiness is “pruritus” (proo-ri’tus).

Itching may make you scratch. This can open fragile skin that has healed.

Itching may get worse at night. This can make it hard to fall asleep. It may also be hard to stay asleep.

Increased body heat and sweat may make the itching worse.

Your healthcare team may ask you to describe the severity of your itch and how it affects your life.

They may use a scale from 0 to 10 to describe the intensity and impact of your itch. On the scale, 0 is “no itch” and 10 is “the worst itch you can imagine.”

I’m sorry to hear that, Jessica. Let’s work together...

...on a scale from 0 to 10, how bad is it? How does your itch affect your activities?
Dr. Anderson tells Jessica there are things she can do to help her itch:

- Use laundry detergent without any scent to wash your clothes.
- Keep fingernails short. This may lessen injury to fragile skin.
- Take a bath with water that is the right temperature for you. Adding a little baby oil may help. It is also important to moisturize after bath or shower.
- Massaging your healed skin with lotion may help.
- Take your mind off itching. Try stretching, exercise, playing a game, or taking up a new hobby.

...Nothing beats a good bath!

So relaxing!
If you still have itch, talk to your healthcare team. There are medicated lotions and medicines that might help.

(Note: Before you take any medicine, talk to your doctor about side effects. Other medicines may also help reduce itching. Talk to your doctor about your options.)

...Try these tips. Your itch will get better.

Visit MSKTC.ORG/BURN for more free research-based resources to support people living with burn injury.

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Our health information content is based on research evidence whenever available and represents the consensus of expert opinion of the Burn Injury Model System directors.

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace the advice of a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider about specific medical concerns or treatment. The contents of this infocomic were developed under grants from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant numbers 90DP0082 and 90DPKT0009). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this infocomic do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

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