



Burns: psychological, social, financial and material support

patient information

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PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

A burn accident is often a very threatening event that patients may experience consciously. Staying at the burns unit can also have a significant impact. The daily changes of dressings, under anaesthesia or not, and possibly the rapid succession of surgeries require a huge amount of physical and mental energy. The treatment can drag on for a very long time. This may cause uncertainty and anxiety about the future.

This is why during your hospital stay you will be supported by a psychologist who is familiar with burn problems. Even if you experience difficulties afterwards in adapting to your changed appearance or in coping with the accident, we will guide and support you. It's important to know that not all burn patients have psychological issues afterwards.

WHAT ISSUES MAY YOU EXPERIENCE?

Adults

Post-traumatic stress

After the accident people may experience short-term post-traumatic stress symptoms such as re-experiencing the accident (nightmares, flashbacks), avoiding situations reminiscent of the accident, increased anxiety, irritability, impaired concentration, and functioning less well than before the accident.

Feeling gloomy and mood swings

Feelings of lethargy and depression are also possible. Some people talk about 'having bad days'. Not wanting to eat, feeling tired, feeling empty, etc. Some emotions are more prominent on certain days than others.

Sleeping problems

Already during your stay in hospital, you may experience sleeping problems: difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep, very light or restless sleep, etc. These problems may continue after your discharge from hospital. During your stay, sleep medication may be prescribed in consultation with your physician. After your hospital stay, we advise you to talk to your GP to ask whether sleep medication is still necessary and how it can be reduced.

Social anxiety

Your body may look different than before the accident because of scarring. You may need time to accept your new appearance. Because of the uncertainty about your changed appearance and reactions to it, some people may avoid social contacts out of shame or fear of having to talk about what happened.

Problems with sex

Skin is sensitive and plays a key role when you're being intimate. Scars may affect your sexual experience because your skin feels different. Feelings of insecurity and/or shame towards the partner

may also cause problems. For most people, these complaints are temporary. However, for some people they don't go away.

Back to work

At some point, your period of incapacity for work will come to an end. When your physical condition allows you to return to work, but you don't feel mentally ready yet, it's important to discuss this with your physician and/or psychologist.

Feelings of grief

These feelings may arise because your body is no longer functioning properly, you have to come to terms with the fact that your body is not the same as before the accident, future plans have fallen apart, the long rehabilitation process, etc. Initially you want to close yourself off from the world, which is a normal reaction in a grieving process. In a later period, you'll find the energy again to look for ways to give this new situation a place in your life.

Re-integration in society

In the same way that you take up your role at home, you also need to take up your role in society again (getting out and about again, going to work, school or your hobby, etc.). This may be a cause of concern for you. It's normal all this scares you and you feel overwhelmed. It's about finding ways how you would like to be approached and what works for you. Give yourself time. Discussing it with family and friends may provide support.

Children

A hospital admission is quite distressing for children. Anxiety is quite common. Depending on their age, it's not always easy for children to express the discomfort caused by burns. As a parent, it's important to take care of your child during this distressing period that is accompanied by many emotions. The trusted presence of parents certainly contributes to a resilient recovery of the child. As a team, we will guide you as best we can.

Despite administering sedative medication, which makes the unpleasant dressing changes as bearable as possible for the child, your child may suffer psychological problems during or after admission. Sometimes the persistent itching or restriction of movement caused by the scar causes psychological problems. The psychological problems of dealing with burns can be very different for children, depending on their age.

Family and friends

Guilt

Your surroundings will also have to deal with the whole event. Your loved ones especially often struggle with feelings of guilt or failure. This is why attention must also be paid to care of the immediate family or surroundings, and the entire burns team is ready to help them cope with the accident as well.

Sex

Physical attractiveness is important to everyone. Your changed appearance may also have an effect on your sexual activity, which is normal. You need to get used to your new body, and you may struggle with your self-image. You may have less desire for sex during the period of recovery and treatment, and sometimes more. Because of the limitations caused by burns, it's not always easy to have sexual intercourse and you may need to find new ways. This may cause tension in your relationship. Talking openly with your partner about what you find difficult, but also about what you find pleasurable, can help. You will have to rediscover your body with your partner by, for example, having your partner touch the healed skin to get used to feeling it, massaging each other, etc.

Referral for psychological support

- Worrying, constantly thinking about how to carry on at home, your hobbies, important contacts, at school, your studies, at work, etc.
- Sleeping problems, nightmares or bad dreams
- Recurrent images of the accident
- Depressed, angry, irritable, tearful, anxious or very insecure
- Difficulty relaxing
- Struggling with your changed appearance
- Worrying about sexual intercourse

Many of the psychological complaints described above are normal reactions to a distressing event such as a burn accident. Most patients show one or several of these complaints. For some, the complaints disappear over time. It may help to talk to a psychologist if the complaints persist for a longer period of time. It's important to contact a psychologist of the burns team and aftercare programme so that specific help can be sought.

SOCIAL, FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT AFTER SUFFERING BURNS

During the aftercare period, some patients face social, financial and/or material problems. Are you experiencing difficulties at work or at school? Is the administration becoming too much and do you need expert support? The social worker can help you with this.

RESUMPTION OF WORK

Not everyone is able to resume work normally after suffering burns. The period of incapacity is different for each patient. Each patient also follows a different programme when returning to work. Perhaps your workstation and position need to be adjusted or your work percentage needs to be adjusted temporarily or permanently.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Children with extensive burns may need to be accompanied on the first day back to school. Please contact the aftercare team for this.

SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS AND CAMPS

SUPPORT OF ADULTS WITH BURNS

Stichting Brandwonden: www.brandwonden.be

Stichting Brandwonden regularly organises activities/camps to meet fellow burns sufferers, in particular, the annual thermal camps in Spa.

They also support patients who qualify for financial compensation for burn treatments.

SUPPORT OF CHILDREN WITH BURNS

- Vzw Pinocchio: www.vzw-pinocchio-asbl.be

Pinocchio regularly organises activities/camps to meet fellow sufferers. They work with three age categories:

- ✓ 0-6: children can participate in activities together with their parent/family
- ✓ 6-16: activities/camps alone or with the family
- ✓ 16+: activities/weekends to meet fellow sufferers

Pinocchio co-organises the thermal camps in Spa for children, with many relaxing fringe activities.

- Help Brandwonden Kids: www.helpbrandwondenkids.be

In cooperation with Stichting Brandwonden, Help Brandwonden Kids provides financial support to parents with child burn victims.

CONTACT DETAILS

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ASK YOUR PHYSICIAN OR NURSE

If you have any questions, write them down here and ask your physician or nurse at your next visit.

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