



Moving In

Burn Safety and Prevention for
Young Adults Living Independently



— **NewYork-Presbyterian**
— Weill Cornell Medical Center



Burn Facts

- Over 65% of all burns happen at home.
- Fire and hot liquids are the most common sources of burns in young adults.
- Adults aged 18 – 24 years are the least likely to have a home fire escape plan.
- Each year, almost 4,000 fires in college dorms and fraternity/sorority houses are reported.
- Cooking, smoking, candles, and arson are the leading causes of fires on college campuses.
- More than 75% of all fires in college housing occur in off-campus residences.

Living on your own not only brings excitement and freedom, but also the need for responsibility and safety. Each year, thousands of people get burned while at home; and tragically, many die from these injuries. By taking some simple steps, many of these burns can be prevented. Here are some tips to help keep you safe as you get ready to live on your own for the first time.

I moved into my new place. What are some common fire and burn hazards?

Burns can occur when your skin comes in contact with something very hot or cold, chemicals, radiation, or electricity, and they can happen in any room or even outside. Sources of injury are common throughout the home and may include:

- Cooking at the stove, oven, hot plate, microwave, or BBQ
- Eating, drinking, and serving hot food and drinks
- Candles
- Smoking
- Space heaters, radiators, and steam pipes
- Electrical wiring, devices, appliances, and cords
- Risky behavior involving fire
- Touching or inhaling chemicals



How can fires and burns be prevented?

There many easy steps to take to avoid fires and burns wherever you are living. Here are some ideas:

Cooking Safety

- Turn pot handles on the stove inwards and cook on back burners when possible.
- Stay in the kitchen and never leave food unattended on the stove while cooking. Use a timer as a reminder to frequently check food in the oven or on the stove.
- Make sure stovetops and hot plates are clear of dish rags, paper towels, and other materials that can catch fire.
- Wear short sleeves or tight-fitting clothing and tie back long hair when at the stove, oven, or BBQ.
- If sharing a kitchen with others, make it a habit to check that the stove and oven are turned off before going out.
- If a grease fire occurs: turn off the heat, and cover the pot with the matching lid, or pour salt or baking soda into the pot. Never move the pot or use water on a grease fire—these will spread the flames.
- If a fire occurs in the oven: turn off the oven, close the door, and wait until the oven has cooled down before opening.

- Always use pot holders or oven mitts when touching hot pots and pans.
- Loosely cover food when heating in the microwave to allow steam to escape. When opening heated or covered containers, point the opening away from you.
- Avoid using metal or aluminum foil in the microwave.
- Place hot food and drinks on a solid, flat surface when making, serving, and eating.
- Let food and drinks cool before carrying, serving, or eating/drinking.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol while cooking.
- While using a barbeque, open the grill cover and light the match before turning on the gas.
- If using a BBQ starter fluid, choose one that is specifically made for charcoal grilling and only apply to coals before lighting.
- Avoid using gasoline or kerosene to start a BBQ or make the fire bigger.

Household Safety

- Use a power strip when plugging multiple devices into one outlet.
- When unplugging electronics or appliances, remove the cord from the outlet at the plug head, not by pulling on the cord.
- Check the condition of cords, electronic devices, appliances, and power tools with each use. Replace immediately if the cord is frayed or cracked, or the device overheats, smokes, or sparks.
- Extension cords are for short-term use only and should be visible when in use. Avoid placing them under a rug or behind a bed or sofa.
- Check that outlet and switch plates are in good condition. If they get hot while in use, unplug the cord or turn off immediately, and have a qualified electrician check the wiring.
- Use electrical appliances away from water.
- When purchasing electrical appliances (such as toasters or coffee makers) buy those with the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) mark to ensure quality.
- When replacing light bulbs, only use those that are the maximum or less watts for that light, and make sure that the light is off before changing the bulb.

- Place lamps on flat surfaces or floors.
- Turn off and disconnect appliances such as toasters, coffee pots, hot plates, and indoor grills when not in use.
- Hire an electrician to check the household wiring and/or follow your dormitory's regulations on acceptable light fixtures, electronics, and appliances.
- Make sure hands are dry before touching any electrical cord, outlet, or circuit.
- Never plug a space heater or other major appliances into an extension cord.
- Turn off and unplug your space heater when leaving the room, your home, or going to bed.
- Keep radiators and space heaters at least three feet away from bedding, curtains, laundry, papers, or other flammables.
- Be sure that your choice of heating equipment is permitted by law in your area: kerosene heaters, chimineas, and firepits are not allowed in all communities.

Candle Safety

- Do not leave burning candles or incense unattended; put them out before leaving the room or going to bed.
- Keep candles and incense away from curtains, bedding, paper, and clothing.
- Trim candle wicks to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.
- Use candle holders that will not tip over and are large enough to catch melting wax or burning ashes.
- Avoid spraying aerosols such as perfume, body spray, hair spray, or cleaning agents near candles, stoves, or any other open flames.
- Keep a flashlight and batteries handy in case of a power outage.

Smoking Safety

- Use large, sturdy ashtrays that will not tip over and wet cigarette/cigar butts and ashes before emptying into the trash can.
- Never smoke in bed, when sleepy, or while impaired by drugs, alcohol, or medications.



I've seen some online videos that showed people doing stunts with fire. No one got hurt, so what's the big deal?

Playing with and doing stunts with fire are never safe. Fire can get out of control quickly and can lead to serious injury, death, and property damage. Here are some ways to prevent burns in these situations:

- Do not play with or misuse fire, matches, lighters, or accelerants (chemicals used to start fires).
- If others around you are misusing fire, find different friends to spend time with or other activities to do.



Why should I be concerned about alcohol, drugs, and fire safety?

Alcohol and drug use can cause drowsiness and decrease the abilities to judge, think, and react. Each one of these side effects increases the risk for getting burned—but together, they can be lethal. Many young adults who die in fires are found to have high blood alcohol levels. Here are some fire and burn safety tips to keep in mind if drugs or alcohol are present:

- Avoid cooking at the stove, hot plate, oven, or BBQ.
- Do not use candles or smoke cigarettes when impaired by drugs and/or alcohol.
- Know your own limits, and hang out with friends who do the same.

Why do I need to know about fire safety and burn prevention? I don't know anyone who has been seriously hurt from this and it's not going to happen to me.

Each year, more than 20,000 Americans are injured and 3,500 die from fires—many of which happen at home. Preventing and surviving a fire are not questions of luck. They are a matter of planning ahead.

- Never ignore fire alarms or fire drills—even if you think it might be a prank or false alarm.
- When inside of any building, always know where the fire exits are located.
- If living in a dorm or apartment building, know where the nearest stairwell exit is located and count the number of doorways between your apartment or room and the exit. In thick smoke, you won't be able to see your way out.
- Know and practice an emergency escape plan from your home, dorm, or apartment.
- Keep hallways and exits clear.
- Never prop hallway or other fire doors open.
- Multi-level buildings may have safety bars on windows or doors. Each of these should have an emergency release device. Know how to use them before an emergency happens.



Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Detectors

- Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors on all levels of your home, including basements and attics, near the kitchen, and outside of all sleeping areas.
- Test batteries monthly and change them at least twice a year (daylight saving time) and whenever the detectors “chirp.”
- Replace smoke alarms every 10 years and carbon monoxide detectors every 5 years.
- Do not disconnect smoke alarms or carbon monoxide detectors or take out working batteries to use in another device.
- Use smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors with the UL (Underwriters Laboratory) symbol.

What do I do if there is a fire?

Follow these steps:

- Stay calm.
- Do not try to put out the fire.
- Get low under the smoke and go!
- Use your fire escape plan: crawl along the floor to get out right away.
- Do not bring belongings with you.
- Close the door behind you.

- Call 911 immediately.
- Get out and stay out! Do not go back inside until you have been told that it is safe to do so.

What do I do if I get burned?

Stop the burn:

- Stop, drop, and roll if your clothes are on fire.
- Take off your clothes if they are soaked with hot liquids or chemicals.
- Remove the burned clothing. If it's stuck, leave it.

Cool the burn:

- Use cool water on the burned areas. Avoid ice and cold water.

Clean the burn:

- Keep the area clean and do not apply creams, ointments, butter, toothpaste, sprays, or other home remedies.

Wrap the burn:

- Cover the burn with a clean, dry cloth or towel.

Call for help:

- Dial 911 and get medical help right away.



The William Randolph Hearst Burn Center at the NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center is one of the largest and busiest burn centers in the nation. We treat nearly 5,000 patients—one-third of whom are kids—each year.

By providing all phases of treatment—from the emergency response to rehabilitation—to patients and families who have suffered a burn injury, the Burn Center provides the expertise, resources, and continuity of care needed to get the best results.

To make an appointment to see a doctor or if you would like to learn more about burn prevention, please call the Hearst Burn Center at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center:

Main Office/Appointments:

(212) 746 – 5410

Burn Outreach/Education:

(212) 746 – 5417

William Randolph Hearst Burn Center at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital

525 East 68th Street, L706, New York, NY 10065

<http://nyp.org/services/burn-center.html>

If you or your family member gets burned, call 911 and seek immediate medical attention!

This information is brief and general. It should not be the only source of your information on this health care topic. It is not to be used or relied upon for diagnosis or treatment. It does not take the place of instructions from your doctor. Talk to your health care providers before making a health care decision.

NewYork-Presbyterian
Weill Cornell Medical Center



MIX
Paper from
responsible sources
FSC® C005812

In keeping with NewYork-Presbyterian's commitment to sustainability, this publication is printed on FSC-certified paper that includes a minimum of 10 percent postconsumer fiber. The FSC-trademark identifies products that are made with fiber from well-managed forests certified by Smartwood in accordance with the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council.

© NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, 2010.