

Psychological Well-Being After a Burn

Your Care

Victorian Adult Burns Service

Psychological challenges and supports



A burn injury can be a very stressful experience. While most people adjust over time, it can be difficult emotionally at different points in recovery. This is totally normal. This handout outlines common emotional reactions, strategies that can help, when to seek professional help, and options for connecting with supports.

Normal feelings following a burn injury

People who have sustained a burn injury often report:

- Feeling anxious, nervous, “jumpy” or worried
- Feeling sad, down or depressed
- Losing interest or pleasure in doing things
- Feeling angry, irritable or on edge
- Difficulty sleeping
- Concerns about healing, scarring or changed appearance
- Feeling troubled by discomfort, pain or itching sensations
- Feeling upset about changed physical abilities, needing to rely on others, or disruptions to work, study and home-life
- Feeling isolated, alienated or distant from others
- Having unwanted or repetitive thoughts about the injury
- Having disturbing memories or dreams about the injury or hospital experience
- “Re-living” the injury or feeling as if it is happening again
- Having strong physical reactions when reminded of the injury (e.g., heart pounding, trouble breathing, sweating)
- Avoiding talking or thinking about the injury and how it occurred
- Avoiding situations that remind them of the injury

The process of recovery

Upsetting feelings typically decrease in the days and weeks following injury. During this time it is especially useful to:

- Stay connected with family and friends
- Keep a regular routine including hobbies and activities that you enjoy
- Take an active role in caring for your burns and rehabilitation
- Practice soothing, relaxing and mindfulness activities
- Keep a regular sleep schedule and wind down before bed
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid excessive use of caffeine, alcohol and substances

Contact information

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Further information:

[https://www.alfredhealth.org.au/
services/hp/burns](https://www.alfredhealth.org.au/services/hp/burns)

<https://www.vicburns.org.au/>

If you would like to provide feedback or request a copy of this information in a different format, contact us at patient.inform@alfred.org.au

When to seek professional support

While many people recover using their existing strategies and supports, seeing a mental health professional can also help with:

- Understanding your experiences and reactions
- Managing anxiety and depression
- Understanding and living with the burn experience
- Adjusting to life after injury
- Reconnecting to work, relationships and other activities that are important to you

Seeking specialist mental health support is particularly important if:

- You feel really distressed, overwhelmed, or not able to cope
- You feel down most of the time for more than two weeks
- You have thoughts about not wanting to live
- You continue to have disturbing thoughts, dreams, physical sensations, or emotions about the injury for more than a month

After a burn you can expect to have strong emotional reactions. This is normal. However, if distress is intense or persistent it is important to seek professional help.

Professional support

Clinical Psychologists are trained in recognising psychological distress and providing personalised support. You may be able to see a Clinical Psychologist while receiving support with the *Victorian Adult Burns Service* – speak with any member of your treating team to find out more. You can also search for psychologists in your area via: <https://www.psychology.org.au/Find-a-Psychologist>

Your GP can also provide support and guidance, including referrals to other mental health professionals. You may be eligible for Medicare-rebated sessions with a *Mental Health Treatment Plan* - talk with your doctor to find out more.

Victorian crisis supports are also available 24/7:

- Find your local mental health crisis service via: <http://www3.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealthservices/>
- **Lifeline** for counselling and crisis support on 13 11 14
- **Directline** for drug and alcohol support on 1800 888 236