
ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

MEDIA RELEASE



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Immediate first-aid helps burn victims but men and electricity don't mix

Recent studies have shown that applying appropriate and immediate first-aid can be very important in the course of treating a burn injury and, when it comes to electrical burns, men and electricity don't mix.

The studies, presented at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' 83rd Annual Scientific Congress currently being held in Singapore, considered the issue of burns care and avoidance.

A study presented by Dr Nathan Schaefer found of all the people with electrical burns presenting to Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital between January 2002 and December 2011 - 95% were men.

Of the 100 patients reviewed, about 40% were in their 30s, 68% were work injuries and 13% occurred at home. Power lines were the major source of injury (33%), then switchboards (26%) and power cords (16%).

The study recommended that the use of 'preventative strategies' aimed at middle-aged men in the workplace would help reduce the incidence of electrical burns.

In a separate study, presenter Dr Varun Harish said that to assess the impact of burn 'first aid' on clinical outcomes, a review was carried out on nearly 5000 cases over a five year period from 2007 to 2012 involving burns patients with less than 10% of total body surface area (TBSA) burns.

The review found that only about 58% received adequate first-aid at the time of the injury but the action led to a statistically significant reduction in the depth of the burn wound and that, if skin grafts were not required, the patient healed two days faster.

The study concluded that first-aid is critically important in the initial management of a burn but there is a need to raise public awareness of recommended first-aid treatment**.

**The Australia and New Zealand Burns Association (ANZBA) recommends treating burns with cold running tap water for 20 minutes (cooling the burn in this manner is useful up to three hours after the injury) and to seek medical advice.

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