

In Search of a Moisturizing Cream For Burned Skin

Any burn survivor knows that itchiness is one of the most frustrating symptoms to suffer from once the burned skin has healed. Burn nurses know that requests for “itchy pills” are very common in burn centres and, unfortunately, the medication doesn’t stop the itching. So what other options are there for the burn survivor?

One of the best ways to decrease the itchiness is to get at the source of the problem: the dry skin. However, burned skin is different from healthy skin. Once the skin has been damaged by a burn injury, there are less natural oils available since the oil-reproducing glands have been destroyed in whole or in part. In other words, the skin is “internally” dry as opposed to “externally” dry, such as when our hands get chapped in the cold weather. What burned skin needs is a product that will be absorbed through the outer layer of the skin (the epidermis) into the dry inner layer (the dermis). Water-based products are needed to do this. The majority of lotions and creams available in the stores say that they “moisturize”. However they moisturize healthy, undamaged skin, not damaged post-burn skin. They also contain large amounts of mineral oil, petroleum or paraffin. These ingredients coat the surface of the skin and, in essence, clog the pores. This prevents loss of natural oils from the inner dermis, oils which burned skin is lacking. These ingredients are not absorbed into the dry dermis and do not bring moisture back into the skin.

How, then, do you find a water-based cream that truly moisturizes a burn survivor’s skin? Many companies do not list their product ingredients. If they do, they are listed in order of “most to least” percentage content. Few list “water” or “deionized water” as an ingredient and, if they do, it’s down the list, indicating little content.

After many years of investigation into the pharmaceutical and cosmetics industries and listening to first-hand evaluations from burn survivors, I recommend the following 2 products, which are readily available at the store and relatively inexpensive:

Vaseline Intensive Care Extra Strength Unscented (Lever-Pond’s Canada); this new addition to the Vaseline product line contains about 70% water - bottle is white with blue and red lettering.

Complex 15 Phospholipid body lotion (Schering Canada) - this product also has a high water content - bottle is white with green and black lettering.

AVOID USING MINERAL OIL AS A MOISTURIZER BECAUSE IT:

1. breaks down elastic fibres in pressure garments
2. strips the skin of natural oils (dehydrates the skin following prolonged use)
3. plugs the pores, creating an acne-like condition
4. has no moisturizing properties
5. does not penetrate or moisturize the skin