

Article for February 12, 2014

This past week was Burn Awareness Week. Interesting enough, over 500,000 people in the U.S. receive medical treatment for burn injuries each year – and almost half of those are scalds.

As my younger brother can attest from a very young age, it's really pretty easy to be scalded – unintentionally, of course! A particular incident comes to mind when I was running bath water for him when he was about two years old or so. The water was a little too hot – as he can attest as he jerked his face back when he tried to drink the hot water! The hot water wasn't the worse part, since he gashed open his cheek as he jerked back. He wound up in the emergency room for stitches.

That incident could have been avoided several different ways, but it's reminded me for years to check the setting on our water heater. The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends setting it to 120 degrees F. Of course, you may want to set it at a different temperature if you have small children or elderly that can be burned easily. It also makes a difference if you have electric heat or gas heat, copper plumbing, or are concerned about diseases.

I was impressed to find out that there are devices called "anti-scald" devices that can be used on tub faucets and shower heads. Some are quick, easy to install and under \$20 on the internet. One in particular screws into the shower head and expands when it reaches 120 degrees. As it expands, it chokes off the flow and only allows a few drops through. It has another feature that shuts off the water in about three seconds if a toilet flush causes a surge of hot water in the shower. The same type of hot water surge can occur when someone uses a dishwasher or clothes washer while someone is in the shower.

But, the shower isn't the only place people may be scalded. I would be at a loss to try to estimate how many times I get in a hurry using a microwave and take a bite before I should! We should allow foods to cool before eating or handling them. Another brother story that comes to my mind was back in the day when we would sit together at a meal and pass the serving dishes around the table. Being such a good, big sister, I remember passing sweet peas in front of my younger brother and – for whatever reason – accidentally spilling hot peas in his lap. (I really WAS a good big sister MOST of the time!) (REALLY!)

Another incident most of us are familiar with is the McDonald's coffee incident. Something else I don't normally think of is how difficult it must be for someone in a wheelchair to handle hot liquids. Most of us can jump up, around, or out of the way when something hot is coming our way – but someone confined to a wheelchair doesn't have the same opportunity! Doing something as simple as placing a large, sturdy tray with a solid handle in your lap could help decrease the risk of lap burns.

There are many other tips can be invaluable, such as having a "kid-free zone" of at least three feet around the stove and areas where hot food or drink is prepared or carried. Never hold a child while you are cooking, drinking a hot liquid, or carrying hot foods or liquids. Never heat a baby bottle in a microwave oven. Heat baby bottles in warm water from the faucet. Choose prepackaged soups whose containers have a wide base or, to avoid the possibility of a spill, pour the soup into a traditional bowl after heating. Always test the bath water by moving your hand, wrist and forearm through the water. The water should feel warm, not hot, to the touch.

Keep these tips in mind and Be Safe Out There!