

# Reintegrating Into Your Life After a Severe Burn: It's A Team Effort

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Make no mistake about it. A severe burn is a major injury that will change your life and the lives of those you love forever. That is why it is so important to make sure you are getting the best possible healthcare. As a burn survivor, you may not have the strength, focus, time, or inclination to personally manage your healthcare team. You will have to rely on help from your family, your closest friends, and trusted advisors. Reintegration post-burn is a team effort.

I doubt anyone lives their life looking ahead to the possibility that they might one day suffer a severe burn. Most people, if not all, do not research their area burn centers and healthcare professionals until after a burn occurs. Luckily, the American Burn Association (ABA) has done the research for us.

The ABA and the American College of Surgeons operate a burn center verification program. ABA-verified burn centers provide high quality patient care and meet strict standards for organizational structure, personnel qualifications, facilities resources and medical care services. Some of the local verified burn centers are:

- Saint Barnabas Burn Center – Livingston, NJ
- Temple University Hospital Adult Burn Center – Philadelphia, PA
- The Nathan Speare Regional Burn Treatment Center/Crozer Chester Medical Center – Upland, PA

Whether you are admitted in an ABA-verified burn center or not, you may have to undergo extensive surgery, pain management, and wound/infection control. You may be facing a lengthy hospital stay. You will likely have major concerns over your appearance and how you will be accepted by your family, friends, and community after you are discharged from the hospital. I recently heard the heartrending story of one burn survivor whose child cried and ran from the room when he first saw his father in the hospital. It will be incredibly difficult, but you must prepare for these extreme reactions as part of the reintegration process.

Burn survivors must deal with people staring. They often have family and friends who are hesitant to

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touch them for fear of hurting them. Burn survivors can experience stress and anxiety associated with their romantic relationships with their spouses and partners.

Surgeons do not address these issues, so burn survivors and their families and loved ones find great support and resources from their physical and occupational therapists, social workers, psychiatrists, and psychologists.

These burn care professionals frequently form an important part of your “inner circle.” Be sure to only include in your “inner circle” the people you trust and feel comfortable around. You do not want to surround yourself with people who will cause you unnecessary stress and frustration. If you have a family member or friend who will try to compare his or her last bout of the flu with your severe burn, it is probably a good idea to keep some distance initially, as those types of comparisons will only anger you.

Burn survivors are not alone in feeling stress and frustration after a severe burn injury. Family members need support and guidance from professionals, too. The time and energy required of the family members of burn survivors can be overwhelming. Here are some tips to help with the reintegration of burn survivors into the family:

- Do not over-schedule the first few weeks.
- Limit visitors.
- Be prepared for many medical appointments.
- If reintegration is posing more of a toll than the survivor or their spouse can handle, recommend that they get help.
- Spend time talking with each other. Listen to the new things their spouse has experienced and felt during their hospitalization.
- If they have healthcare related questions make a list and be sure to bring it to your clinic visit.
- Ask friends and family for help.

Remember, from your surgeon to your social worker to your spouse, reintegration after a burn is a team effort. The quality and quantity of resources available to burn survivors and their families are tremendous. Beyond the hospital and home, there are excellent burn camps and support organizations, like the Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors, which provide invaluable resources and opportunities for growth, healing and reintegration for burn survivors.

In addition to the resources above, an attorney with experience representing burn survivors who were injured by the negligence of another person can be a valuable part of your post-burn support team. At a time when your health is most important, do you want to spend time resolving issues with medical bills and insurance companies denying benefits?

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