

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Contact: Bridgette Rose McNeill
(214) 648-3404

BURN SPECIALISTS BLAME DEEP FRYERS FOR INCREASE IN GREASE BURNS TO CHILDREN

DALLAS — May 19, 1995 — When you deep fry, you not only risk clogged arteries, you also may endanger your children.

The popularity of home deep fryers has led to an increase in the number of children burned by hot grease, burn specialists at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas report in the May issue of *Archives of Surgery*.

Of the most recent pediatric grease-burn patients they treated, half (54 out of 108) had been injured by home deep fryers.

"We had a number of grease burns while I was on service, and it caught my eye because they are such devastating injuries," said Dr. Joseph Murphy, lead author of the report and an assistant surgery instructor at UT Southwestern. "These injuries are devastating because they frequently involve the face, hands and neck. It's a very visible injury.

"This type of burn represents a new trend in pediatric trauma in the home," he said.

Murphy, along with Drs. Gary Purdue and John Hunt, both professors of surgery at UT Southwestern and co-directors of the burn unit at Parkland Memorial Hospital, reviewed admissions to the regional burn center at Parkland during the last 20 years. The report, "Pediatric Grease Burn Injury," represents the most comprehensive look at children and grease burns in publication.

Of the 2,651 pediatric patients admitted to Parkland with acute burn injuries in the last 20 years, 8 percent or 215 patients had burns caused by hot oil or grease. The children ranged in age from 1 month to 14 years, and most injuries were to children less than 6 years old.

(MORE)

GREASE BURNS — 2

The surgeons concluded that injuries often resulted from oversight or carelessness in the kitchen such as a young child using the cord to pull a deep fryer or electric skillet off a kitchen counter.

"Unfortunately, the rate of grease-burn injury is increasing," said Dr. Purdue.

"Society seems to ignore the benefits of low cholesterol on life span and continues to deep-fat fry."

While the most common burns to children are due to scalding water, grease is a greater threat because of its high boiling point and high viscosity compared with hot water.

"Grease is inherently dangerous — more so than hot water," Purdue said. "It's stickier, it doesn't flow and it doesn't evaporate."

As a result, grease burns are usually deeper and lead to serious infections. Most of these burns cause long-lasting, disfiguring and debilitating injuries that require extensive treatment and rehabilitation.

"I'd like to see parents keep their children out of the kitchen while they cook," Purdue said. "Children need to learn to respect what goes on in the kitchen."

No deaths were caused by grease burns, the review found.

Only increased public awareness and careful use of deep fryers in the home can reverse this trend, the authors conclude.

###