

Hot water bottle leak sends 9-year-old girl to hospital with nasty scalding

Her mother has shared her story to prevent this happening to anyone else.

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By Karyn Henger



The nights are getting chillier, but before you reach for your hot water bottle we urge you to read this cautionary tale and follow our safety checklist at the end of this story.

On a cold winter's evening last August, nine-year-old Anna Crouchman kissed her mum Tracey goodnight and headed off to bed. Tracey had placed a hot water bottle in Anna's bed about a half-hour before, and the Cambridge schoolgirl, gymnast and musical theatre fan was all set to snuggle down and read for a bit before switching off her light for the night.

But not long after saying goodnight, she wandered back into the lounge to tell Tracey her hot water bottle had leaked through her bed.

"I just said, 'Oh, well let's go and sort your sheets out then,'" Tracey says.

"She wasn't crying or screaming or anything like that."

It wasn't until Tracey began changing Anna's sheets that she noticed Anna was holding her pyjama pants away from her leg - and that's when it dawned on her that the water had also leaked on to Anna's legs.

Tracey had filled the hot water bottle with boiling water.

In a state of panic she called [Healthline](#), and was told to get Anna's legs straight under cold running water. She then called an ambulance and says it was the best thing she could have done.



Nine-year-old Anna Crouchman spent five nights in hospital after being scalded when her hot water bottle leaked.

The ambulance paramedics wrapped Anna's legs and gave her pain relief. By the time they arrived at Waikato hospital Anna's legs had completely blistered and the pain had started to kick in.

"I now know she couldn't feel it initially because she'd actually burnt all her nerve endings," Tracey explains.

Anna remained in hospital for five nights and was fortunate that she didn't need skin grafts. But she does have to wear pressure stockings 24 hours a day for one to two years, and has just

endured the hottest summer on record since 1935 in the stockings. Frequent, daily moisturising is a must.

At the time Anna had just landed the lead role in her school production, Cinderella Rockerfella, and was determined to keep her part despite doctors warning her she may have to step down.

Tracey says she couldn't be prouder on opening night. "She is a very determined little girl."



*Anna was determined to keep her role as Cinderella in her school production
Photo by Your Cambridge News.*

The family, which no longer has hot water bottles in the house, is not sure how old the hot water bottle was (but it wasn't a new one), and says Anna had simply brushed it with her foot when it split open.

"She hadn't jumped on it or anything like that."

Anna has been left with scars on her left lower leg and right thigh.

Reaching out to others who have suffered burns has been key to her daughter's emotional recovery, Tracey says.

"Anna has just recently come back from a [camp](#) with the [Burn Support Group Charitable Trust](#), and she had such an awesome time hanging out with 20 other children who were also burns survivors... Being with the other kids gave her another form of acceptance for what she's been through. I can't speak highly enough about the burn support group."

If Anna's story prevents an accident like this from happening to someone else then speaking out has been worthwhile, Tracey says.

"We'd just like to raise an awareness about something that is so preventable."

Guidelines around hot water bottle safety

According to [Consumer Protection](#), hot water bottles sold in New Zealand must meet the British Standard.

To check the safety standard on your hot water bottle look for a code that should be stamped on the bottle neck. The accepted versions of the standard are British Standard BS 1970:2012, BS 1970:2006 and BS 1970:2001.

All new hot water bottles available for sale should only have BS 1970:2012 marked on the neck.

Other measures you can take:

1. Never fill your hot water bottle with boiling water. Use hot water from the tap.
2. Check your hot water bottle for splits or tears regularly. One method is to fill with cold water to see if any leaks appear.
3. Use a cover, or wrap the bottle in a towel before using.
4. Make sure the top is firmly closed before using.
5. For children and the elderly, use the bottle to warm the bed, then remove before the person gets into bed.
6. Do not lie or sit on the hot water bottle.
7. Do not overfill.
8. Do not use a hot water bottle that is showing signs of wear or splitting – replace it with a new one.

What to do if you or your child suffers a burn or scald

The [St John](#) website advises removing surrounding clothing/jewellery (provided it is not stuck to the burned area) and immediately putting the burned area under cool running water for 20 minutes.

In the absence of water any cool clean fluid (beer, soft drink, etc) can be used.

After cooling the injured area for up to 20 minutes, apply a sterile dressing. Use a non-adherent dressing or a piece of clean plastic kitchen wrap.

Contact your doctor or call 111.

DO NOT break blisters or remove peeled skin.

DO NOT try to remove any fabric that is stuck to a burn.

DO NOT apply creams, ointments, lotions or butter to any burn injury because infection may occur

and complicate the injury.

DO NOT place small children or babies in a cold bath or shower for a full 20 minutes, as this can cause hypothermia.