

The painful truth about hot water bottles

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Anna Crouchman spent five days in hospital after receiving a severe burn on her lower leg from a hot water bottle.

GRAPHIC CONTENT: In August 2017, Tracey Crouchman's 10-year-old daughter Anna hopped into bed to read a book with a hot water bottle by her feet.

"I hadn't left her for long when Anna said she simply moved her foot onto the bottle and it just burst," Crouchman said.

The boiling water burned Anna's lower left leg and right thigh. Her panicked mum rushed her daughter to Waikato Hospital where she spent the next five days.



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A Stuff poll found 64 per cent of parents give their children a hot water bottle at night.

"It was a life changing event for Anna and the entire family," she said, " We're at the beginning of the journey and we still don't know how the scar will look when she gets older."

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Anna didn't require a skin graft, but now has to wear pressure stockings for 24 hours a day over the next one to two years.



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Anna's mother, Tracey Crouchman, warned parents to "stop for a moment and think" before they decide to give their child a hot water bottle.

"It's been a whirlwind for Anna," Crouchman said. "This experience has challenged her in ways she's never imagined - both physically and emotionally - but she's such a trooper and has pushed through with sheer grit and determination."

Since Anna's accident, the Crouchman family have tried to "turn a negative experience into a positive one" by dedicating themselves to raising awareness about the dangers of hot water bottles.

"My gut advice would be to never use a hot water bottle, but it is not my place to tell others how to raise their kids," she said. "I've just seen or heard about too many scary instances where both old and new hot water bottles have burst and, having seen the damage it can do, we just don't want to risk it."



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Ann-Louise received a "crater-like" burn after she fell asleep with a hot water bottle on her lower leg.

An average of 596 ACC claims were made each year since 2013 by people who received burns from hot water bottles, and the number is rising. In 2017 there were 631 claims, up from 500 in 2013.

While ACC said there was 28 hot water bottle burn claims in the zero to nine years age band in 2017, followed by 95 in the 10 to 19-year-old band. Medical professionals said water burns were still a serious problem.

Dr John Goldsmith, a paediatrician at Waikato Hospital, said he was "distressed" by the number of children who have come into the hospital with serious burns.



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Check the safety standard on your rubber or PVC hot water bottle before you buy it. This should be permanently marked on the bottle and is usually stamped on the bottle neck.

The hospital has been inundated with roughly one to two "preventable" burn victims under the age of two each week over the past few months.

"These children who are coming into the hospital aren't suffering from minor burns," Dr Goldsmith said. "They're suffering from serious injuries that require skin grafts, general anesthetic, plastic surgery and long term hospital stays."

Dr Goldsmith said all of the burns that he has dealt with recently - which range from children being burned from exposed fireplaces to boiling water being spilled on them - have been unfortunate, yet preventable, accidents.



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Jean received a severe burn on her foot from a hot water bottle. "I'm unfortunately old enough that I should know better," she said.

"These accidents have all occurred simply because these children are at an age where they are curious and want to explore their surroundings but soon find themselves exposed to an unsafe environment," he said.

"It's a much bigger problem than most people realise and a lot of parents don't realise the hidden risks that lie around the home."

It's not just children who are receiving burns from hot water bottles, in 2017 there were 107 ACC claims made in the 20 to 29-year-old age band and 81 claims made in the 50 to 59-year-old age band.

Hawkes Bay resident, Ann-Louise Geary, suffered a third degree burn on her lower leg in July 2017 after falling asleep with a hot water bottle by her feet.

"I didn't feel anything through the night but when I woke up in the morning to see that all of the nerve ending on my leg had been burned," Geary said. "I still don't know how exactly how it happened, but it was either from a slow leak or because it had been left in one spot on my leg for too long."

Geary described the burn as "like a crater in my leg, it looked like a hockey puck had taken a chink out of it". Geary's burn took months to heal and almost required a skin graft.



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Ann-Louise's wound while she was on intravenous antibiotics due to an infection in the surrounding skin.

"It was a battle," she said of her four-month healing process.

Having grown up using hot water bottles, Geary was surprised to discover a number of friends had also been burned by the product recently.

"I am aware of multiple other hot water bottle injuries through friends at work and am convinced that the quality of the products available have deteriorated, particularly the quality of the plug seal and the thickness of the rubber bottle itself," she said.

"It makes me emotional to think about, but I just didn't appreciate how much damage a hot water bottle burn could do."

Michelle Henry from the Auckland-based [Burn Support Group Charitable Trust](#) said educating the public on how to safely use hot water bottles was a matter of "absolute urgency".

"We desperately need more education," Henry said. "All of the information is out there but it's important to remind people about the potential dangers in their home that often slip from their minds."

The Burn Support Group sees people with with burns from a multitude of sources but Henry said boiling water was "hands down the biggest culprit".

"The number of children receiving severe burns from hot water bottles is staggering," she said. "The sad thing is that they are caused by pure accidents."

Henry recommended only ever filling your hot water bottle with warm water from the tap.

If the water at the tap is still too hot and you are unable to adjust it correctly, the Burn Support Group recommended people call their landlord or ask their local energy supplier (or licensed plumber) for advice.

IF YOU RECEIVE A BURN...

- * Run cool water gently over the burn for 20 minutes or, in serious cases, until an ambulance arrives.
- * Do not touch the burn or burst any blisters as this can cause infection.
- * Once cooled remove clothing from the burned area. If clothing sticks, cut around the fabric.
- * Cover the burn with clean non-fluffy material, e.g. a sheet or loosely cover with plastic wrap to prevent infection.
- * In an emergency call 111