



YES

NO

## To ER or Not to ER?



Medical experts answer the ultimate question for common household mishaps

BY ELLEN RYAN

**K**IDS ARE ALWAYS COURTING TROUBLE.

Reminders to “be careful!” seem to go in one ear and out the other as they leap from one precarious situation—scaling a backyard tree, skateboarding down a homemade ramp—to the next.

As a parent, you get used to holding your breath (and crossing your fingers) after witnessing a fall or accident. You wipe the tears and wait to see how much damage was done: Can I patch this up on my own with a few kisses and a Band-Aid, or are we headed to the hospital for professional help?

Here medical experts from around the country look at seven typical household mishaps, weighing in on when you and your injured child should be ER-bound.

This is day two of your preteen's headache. She's stayed in bed, has barely eaten and now is vomiting. "My ear hurts," she snuffles.



"HAS THIS CHILD HAD BAD HEADACHES BEFORE? IF SO, SHE CAN RIDE THIS one out," says Jennifer S. Kriegler, director of the Headache Fellowship Program at the Cleveland Clinic and staff member of its Center for Headache and Pain. "If it's 'the first or the worst,' coming to the ER—not urgent care—is not too drastic."

Why? Doctors may need to do a CT scan (quicker and easier than an MRI) or lab work to rule out bleeding in the brain, meningitis or thyroid disease. Most likely this is a migraine, Kriegler says. But doctors can't say so without more information, and listing your child's symptoms will help.

Your son is heating spaghetti sauce on the stove. As he grabs for a ladle, he bumps the pot and boiling sauce lands on his feet. Ouch!



**PROBABLE THIRD-DEGREE BURNS MEAN A** trip to the ER, says David Greenhalgh, chief of burns at Shriners Hospital for Children-Northern California in Sacramento. Three reasons: "You never know the extent of the damage. There's a significant risk of infection and scarring; it'll be hard to wear shoes if this doesn't heal well. And delaying treatment is a classic sign of an intentional burn or child abuse."

Do not apply ice. Just cover the area loosely with a clean, dry cloth. Going to a pediatrician also works if you trust you can be seen quickly, Greenhalgh says.



You just mopped the kitchen floor when your daughter tries a cheerleading split. Not realizing the floor is damp, she splits a little more than expected. Now she's holding her groin and turning white.



**TREAT IMMEDIATELY WITH ICE IN A WET WASHCLOTH,** says Marianne Ryan, clinical director of MRPT Physical Therapy in New York City and an orthopedic certified specialist diplomate.

Follow ice treatment with gentle stretches when the pain stops. "A doctor can prescribe anti-inflammatory medications for the strained or torn groin muscle," Ryan says. "The other, preferable course is to see a physical therapist, who may work directly on the muscles to increase flexibility and decrease spasm. Then a progressive exercise program would be used to restore the child to normal function."

If she's in severe pain or there's a bruise or blood, head for the ER.