

# Fire Eating Safety Guidelines

Carnival of the Divine Imagination

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## Common Sense

Never attempt to fire eat under the influence of any drug, especially alcohol. Check your fire eating equipment before use to ensure it is free from damage. First practice the motions of fire eating with an unlit skewer. It is important to feel 'comfortable' with fire before attempting live fire-eating stunts. 'Get to know' your flame and become familiar with the way it burns before practicing fire eating stunts with a live flame.

## Finding a good location

The best spot for fire eating is in a high ceilinged area free from overhanging flammable objects that is well ventilated, but without any noticeable breeze. If you are fire eating outdoors, make sure you are in a space that is resistant to wind, and in particular, changes in wind direction. Unpredictable wind conditions are a major cause of fire eating burns.

## Heat goes up

Remember that! The biggest key to not burning yourself while fire eating or performing other localised fire stunts is that heat rises, and that *under the flame* is a smart place to be.

## Breathing

It is important to have excellent breath control while fire eating. It is imperative that you NEVER inhale while a flame is in your mouth. This can cause serious burns and poisoning by ingestion of harmful vapours. To prepare your breathing, practice simple breath control by breathing in slowly for 10 counts, holding for 10 counts, then exhaling slowly for another 10 counts. NEVER attempt fire eating while puffed or out of breath. Always be calm, focussed, and in control of your breathing. If you sense you are running out of breath while fire eating, remove the torch IMMEDIATELY.

## What's burning?

The fuel, of course! Which is why choice of fire eating fuel is so important. The role of the wick is to act like a sponge in which to soak up the fuel that will do the burning. Makeshift wicks or those constructed with cotton or cotton wool will deteriorate after just a few uses and may actually begin to burn if not extinguished before the fuel has evaporated out. If the wick itself begins to burn, it will heat up considerably, making fire eating more difficult and dangerous. Higher-grade wicks such as those made with Kevlar will last longer and are not subject to burning out like cotton wicks can. Remember that although the flame is at its biggest after ignition, the wick is also at its coolest. As the wick burns for longer, the fire-eating torch begins to heat up, and though the flame may be smaller, it may in fact be hotter and more difficult to fire eat. For these reasons, always extinguish your wick and do not let it smoulder.

## What's hot?

The hottest part of your fire eating equipment is not the fuel, nor the wick, but the metal skewer. Avoid contact with any metal close to the wick after ignition, even for a few minutes after the flame is extinguished. When fire eating, it is not necessary to completely seal your lips around the metal skewer in order to extinguish a flame, and therefore, it is never necessary to come into contact with this part of the skewer. For this reason also, NEVER construct fire-eating skewers with metal binding or screws embedded in the wicks. ALWAYS use a heat resistant thread like Kevlar threading to stitch together a reusable wick.

## Fuels

The best fuels to use for fire eating are similar to those commonly used for fire twirling, but of the odourless and tasteless varieties. Though it is possible to fire eat with kerosene for example, it is a rather unpleasant experience. Try odourless kerosene, or commercially sold "Fire Water" or "Fire Sol" from juggling shops. These fuels have a relatively low burn temperature and a relatively high flash point, making them relatively safe to use and manageable for fire eating. Avoid inhalation at all times. Take particular care not to inhale odourless fuels as it is not always obvious when inhaling these fumes and they may cause severe damage to your lungs. Always keep fuel in a sealed, well labelled container.

## Burns

Any small burn to your mouth or lips will usually heal very quickly. Tend to any burns by running the burn under cold running water. If the burn is major, seek medical attention.

## Preparation

After you have lit your wick, run through these quick preparation steps to ensure you are ready to fire eat:

- 1. Check wind direction again.** Though you may not sense any wind on your skin, what the flame does above your burning wick is the most important indication of whether or not the state of wind is safe in which to fire eat. If the flame is flickering unpredictably, it is too dangerous to fire eat. If it burns predictably straight up, the wind situation is safe.
- 2. Shrug your shoulders slightly and tilt your head right back** so that your face and most importantly, mouth and throat are facing directly up.
- 3. Wet your lips.** Lips can dry out fast and will be the first thing to feel the dry heat of the flame.
- 4. Breathe in.** As you ready yourself to fire eat, take a slow deep breath in to a level that you can hold comfortably without feeling bloated, so that if startled, you can only naturally exhale, and cannot accidentally inhale.