

Bruise

What is a bruise?

A bruise is an injury of the tissue under the skin that causes an area of discolored skin. Another word for bruise is contusion.

What is the cause?

Bruises often result from an injury, like when you fall or get hit by something. Small blood vessels bleed into the tissues under the skin and cause the skin to change colors.

There are things that may make you bruise more easily, such as medicines or supplements, a lack of certain vitamins, or a blood-clotting problem. Older adults bruise more easily because their blood vessels are more fragile and their skin thins with age.

What are the symptoms?

The usual symptoms are pain, swelling, and discolored skin. Some bruises may cause only a little tenderness, but deep bruises of muscles can be very painful. Bruises are usually blue, dark red, or purple at first and then slowly fade over a couple of weeks to various shades of brown, yellow, and green.

How are they treated?

Most bruises need no special treatment. The body will repair the bruised area and the skin will return to a normal color.

Some bruises can be a sign of a more serious injury, such as:

- Bruises on the abdomen, chest, or lower back
- Bruising around both eyes ("raccoon eyes") after injury to the head

Get prompt medical care for these types of bruises to make sure they are not signs of more serious injury.

How can I take care of myself?

Here are some things you can do to relieve pain and reduce swelling:

- Rest the part of your body that is hurt, particularly if it is painful.
- Put an ice pack, gel pack, or package of frozen vegetables wrapped in a cloth on the injured area every 3 to 4 hours for up to 20 minutes at a time for the first day or two after the injury.
- Lightly wrap the bruised area with an elastic bandage (Ace wrap) or soft cloth if it is swollen.
- Keep an injured arm or leg above the level of the heart as much as possible to help decrease the pain and swelling. You may need to prop it on a pillow to keep it resting higher than the heart.

- When the swelling has stopped, usually after the second day, a warm washcloth or heating pad set on the lowest setting may help the bruise heal faster.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) for pain.
- Don't massage the bruised area.

Contact your healthcare provider if:

- You are getting bruises for no reason.
- A bruise does not heal.
- You have bruising around the eyes.
- You have bruising with unexplained bleeding from the nose, gums, or eyes.
- You have blood in the urine.

How long do the effects last?

Most bruises go away in a couple weeks. Severe bruises cause deep tissue damage and may take several weeks to heal.

How can I help prevent bruises?

Bruises are usually accidental and hard to prevent. If you play contact sports or activities that increase your risk of injury, wear protective padding.

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