



Student Health Center

UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: BRUISE / HEMATOMA

The Student Health Provider has treated you today for a bruise or hematoma.

A bruise is a discoloration of the skin caused by a blow. The blow breaks small blood vessels, releasing blood in the skin and fatty tissue under the skin. “Black and blue” discoloration results.

A hematoma is a collection of blood which makes a bulge or swelling under the skin. The leaked blood is confined within a space and can't get out.

Symptoms of a bruise/hematoma include pain, tenderness to touch, swelling, and discoloration. Pain ranges from absent (with a simple bruise) to fairly severe (with a large amount of bleeding and swelling).

Be aware that another area of discoloration often appears below the area of a severe bruise or hematoma several days later. Gravity pulls the blood downward between the layers of tissue.

A bruise or hematoma usually goes away with time: The blood in a bruise or hematoma is eventually reabsorbed and put back to use by the body.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR BRUISE / HEMATOMA:

- 1- Rest the affected area.
- 2- Elevate the affected area. Elevation helps reduce pain and swelling. If the injury is on an arm or leg, keep the limb above the level of your heart.
- 3- Apply cold to the area off-and-on the first two days. Cold also reduces pain and swelling.
- 4- Acetaminophen (tylenol) can be take for discomfort. Aspirin should be avoided, as it tends to increase bleeding.
- 5- If the bruise is on a leg or arm, compression (wrapping with an ace wrap) may help. Compression is especially helpful after 24 hours, when you begin to gradually resume activity.
- 6- After two days, warm soaks may help heal the bruise more quickly.
- 7- Return promptly to the Student Health Center if your condition worsens. Specifically, seek care for a sharp increase in pain, a sudden, large increase in swelling, or pain/numbness/lack of color in an arm or leg below a bruise.
- 8- Schedule a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor if the pain and swelling are not progressively decreasing over days to a week.