



University of North Carolina Wilmington  
Abrons Student Health Center

## 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 significant (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 packs to the area off-and-on for the first two days after injury. Cold helps ease discomfort, and minimizes additional swelling. Do not apply ice directly to the area, causing discomfort. Rather, aim for coolness, yet comfort, applying a layer or two of cloth between the cold pack and affected area
4. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be taken 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. Return to the Student Health Center or schedule a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral provider if the pain and swelling are not progressively decreasing over days to a week.