

EASYBRUISING



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Most bruises form when small blood vessels (capillaries) near your skin's surface are broken by the impact of a blow or injury. When this happens, blood leaks out of the vessels and initially appears as a bluish-black mark. Generally, the harder the blow, the larger the bruise. However, if you bruise easily, a minor bump — one you may not even notice — can result in substantial discoloration. Eventually your body reabsorbs the blood, and the mark usually disappears.

As time passes, several factors may contribute to increased bruising, including:

Aging capillaries - Over time, the tissues supporting these vessels weaken, and capillary walls become more fragile and prone to rupture.

Thinning skin - With time, your skin becomes thinner and loses some of the protective fatty layer that helps cushion your blood vessels against injury. Excessive exposure to the sun can affect your skin much like aging does.

Medications and supplements can cause easy bruising

Blood-thinning drugs such as aspirin and warfarin (Coumadin) or medications such as clopidogrel (Plavix) reduce your blood's ability to clot. Because of this, bleeding from capillary damage that would normally stop quickly may take longer to stop, allowing enough blood to leak out to cause a bruise.

Corticosteroids cause your skin to thin, making it easier to bruise.

Certain dietary supplements such as Vitamin E, fish oil, ginkgo, ginger and garlic also may increase your bruising risk, since these supplements have a blood-thinning effect.

When bruises indicate problems that are more serious

Bruising may also indicate something more serious, such as a blood-clotting problem or a blood disease. You may need further evaluation if:

- You have unusually large or painful bruises, particularly if your bruises seem to develop for no known reason
- You're bruising easily and you're experiencing abnormal bleeding elsewhere, such as from your nose, gums or intestinal tract
- You have no history of bruising but suddenly experience bruises, particularly if you recently started a new medication

To diagnose the cause of your bruising, your primary doctor may do tests that measure the ability of your blood to coagulate.

Avoiding bruises

Once a bruise has formed, not much can be done to treat it. Most eventually disappear as your body reabsorbs the blood.

If swelling is associated with the bruising, applying a cold compress for 20 minutes at a time and elevating the affected area may help. After the swelling has gone down, a warm compress may speed removal of the blood.

To prevent minor bruising, eliminate household clutter that could cause bumps or falls. Long-sleeved shirts and pants may provide an extra layer of protection for your skin. Avoid prolonged exposure to the sun to help you avoid its aging effects and the increased bruising risk that may result.