

Bruising



Medical fact file
Information for donors

Bruising



Although we hope that no donor will have any ill-effects from giving blood, occasionally bruising of the arm may develop. The bruise can look very dramatic and some people may find this worrying, especially if it appears away from the donation area or is not visible until the next day. Bruising can look very nasty, but it is usually harmless and will disperse with time.

What is bruising?

Bruising is caused by bleeding under the skin. For example, a hard knock which does not break the skin can damage fragile blood vessels which lie just beneath. These damaged blood vessels leak a small amount of blood, which collects in the area as a bruise. With time, the familiar blue-black discoloration changes to green, then yellow and eventually fades and disappears. This may take up to three weeks if the bruise is large. It is normal for bruises to spread out before fading.

Why can it happen after blood donation?

- When the needle is taken out of the arm, bleeding will continue until the small hole in the vein closes up.
- When the donation needle is inserted into the arm, damage to the other side of the vein may occur, causing a small hole through which blood can leak. This is not always seen during the donation but may become apparent afterwards.
- There are tiny fragile blood vessels running just under the skin, as well as the larger veins from which blood donation is obtained. When the donation needle is inserted into the arm, one of these small vessels may be damaged and bleeding occurs. It is impossible to predict this, as such vessels are not usually visible.

What can be done?

The most important way of preventing a bruise is to apply pressure as advised by a member of staff, until the bleeding has stopped. A plaster will be applied to the area to keep it clean. It should be kept on for a minimum of six hours.

Additionally, if you are wearing a tight sleeve, we may ask you to remove that article of clothing and we will provide you with a T-shirt. A tight sleeve can act as a tourniquet and cause congestion in the vein, increasing the chance of bruising.

If a bruise occurs during the donation, we may discontinue the donation to prevent the bruise worsening. You may also be more likely to develop a bruise if your donation is more difficult than usual.



What can you do?

Bruising may be painful and you should avoid heavy lifting for a few days as this could aggravate the pain in your arm. However, gentle movement is recommended whilst the bruise is healing.

Applying something cool to the area can help to relieve any pain or discomfort. A clean cold cloth or flannel is ideal. If you require more pain relief, we recommend taking paracetamol (according to the manufacturer's instructions) and avoid taking aspirin or ibuprofen, for the first 24 hours.

If you experience any of the following, you should seek further help:

- severe pain
- numbness or persistent 'pins and needles' in the arm, hand or fingers
- swelling which is large or increasing in size
- painful redness/inflammation

If any of these occur, or if you are worried, you can obtain advice by ringing our donor helpline on 0300 123 23 23.

Our donor helpline is open for general enquiries 24 hours a day, every day of the year. If you have a non-urgent medical enquiry, please try to contact us between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.



If you have given blood and become unwell

If you have given blood and you become unwell (except for a cold or coldsore) in the two weeks following your donation, ring our donor helpline as soon as possible, on 0300 123 23 23.

The National Blood Service is part of NHS Blood and Transplant, a Special Health Authority within the NHS.

[**www.blood.co.uk**](http://www.blood.co.uk)