

The ABCs of Blister Care

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Blisters are commonly seen in all types of athletic populations from the pee-wee leagues to the weekend warriors. We have all undoubtedly had a blister at one point and will more than likely encounter them again. Though blisters may be nagging they can be prevented. The key to blister success is prevention and proper treatment.

CAUSE

Blisters form when friction and irritation cause the first and second layers of skin to separate. Fluid then fills the space between the two layers of skin and a blister is formed. This is regularly seen on the soles of the feet and palms of the hands. However, they can develop other places where sporting equipment or clothing rubs the skin. This friction combined with a warm, moist environment is the perfect recipe for blisters.

TREATMENT

If you get a blister, the goal is to keep it from getting bigger and to avoid infection. The best treatment for small, unbroken blisters is to leave them alone. They will heal naturally on their own. However, if a blister breaks it should be cleaned often with soap and warm water. Antibacterial soap, betadine, and hydrogen peroxide can all be used to clean the area. Be sure to leave the top layer of skin on to avoid infection and help speed the healing process. Blisters that break take slightly longer to heal, especially if the top layer of skin is missing.

PREVENTION

The first step to preventing blisters is to minimize areas where friction may occur. This can be done by wearing the proper fitting footwear, two pairs of socks, gloves, and padding the body in areas vulnerable to excess friction. Make sure your footwear is the appropriate size and shape for your foot. Shoes or clothing that are too small or tight may create blisters.

One trick when wearing two pairs of socks is to place the first sock on inside out and the second sock on normally. This helps to reduce the friction between the two socks.

WHEN SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED

As discussed earlier, most blisters will begin to heal naturally on their own after a few days with proper care and hygiene. However, it is a concern if the blister is painful or becomes infected. Large painful blisters can be drained and treated by a trained professional. **DO NOT** try to drain the blister without the consultation of a certified athletic trainer, physician, or other trained professional. Improperly draining a blister may result in further damage or infection.

Signs of infection include pus, red and warm skin around the blister, and red streaks leading away from the blister. If you have any signs of infection, it is important to consult your primary care physician immediately.

*Consult your primary care physician for more serious injuries that do not respond to basic first aid. As an added resource, the staff at **Children's Sports Medicine** is available to diagnose and treat sports-related injuries for youth or adolescent athletes. Services are now available in four locations, to make an appointment, call **614-355-6000**.*