

When Should I See My Doctor About Bruises?

So you've hardly ever been bruised before, but lately you've been covered with them. Even worse, you can't recall how you got most of them. It's probably a good idea to see your doctor to find out what's going on.

You may bruise more easily because of a new drug you've started to take. Or, if you really stop to think about it, maybe you've been bumping into things a lot more lately for one reason or another. Maybe you just need a new pair of glasses.

Some health conditions can cause you to bruise more often. Your doctor can diagnose a problem and offer you treatment, if it's needed.

What Will My Doctor Look For?

When you visit your doctor, there are a number of tests and exams you may get:

Health history. If you've had any history of bruising before, your doctor will want to know. He'll also ask about:

- Diseases you've had
- Medicines you take
- Symptoms besides bruising
- Medical history of your closest relatives

Physical exam. He'll likely examine you from head to toe, taking note of any bruises on your body. He may be looking at the quality of your skin: Is it paler than it should be? Is it thinner or more fragile than it should be? He may also look for lumps beneath your bruises or enlarged lymph nodes.

Blood test. It's likely your doctor will take some blood to help diagnose your problem. Some of the things he'll look for include:

- Low levels of **red blood cells**, which could mean you have anemia.
- Your **white blood cell** count or **blood platelet** levels if he suspects leukemia or lymphoma.
- **Tumor markers** if he suspects another type of cancer
- Low levels of certain **clotting factors** that may point to disorders like hemophilia or von Willebrand disease (VWD).

Blood-clotting test. Some people with blood-clotting disorders have known about their condition since they were babies. Others may not find out about it until they're adults.

To test for one, your doctor will prick your skin with a special tool, then measure how long it takes for your blood to clot. The longer that it takes to clot, the more likely it is that a clotting problem may be to blame for your bruises.

Bone marrow biopsy. You might get this if your blood test leads your doctor to suspect you have leukemia. After your skin is numbed, a small, hollow needle will be used to remove a bit of marrow from your pelvic bone, along with some blood and bone. The tissue will be studied under a microscope to see if there's cancer .

Treatment

How your doctor decides to treat you depends upon your diagnosis.

If your bruises are caused by medicine you're taking, your doctor may prescribe something different. But if the drug's effects are more helpful than harmful, your doctor may suggest lifestyle changes or other ways for you to try to avoid getting bruised.

If you're diagnosed with anemia, the treatment will vary based on the type of anemia you have. Your doctor may ask you to change your diet and take iron supplements, or he may prescribe medicine or suggest a medical procedure.

If you're diagnosed with leukemia, lymphoma or another form of cancer, you may need:

- Chemotherapy
- Targeted therapy
- Combination therapy
- Stem cell transplant
- Surgery
- Radiation
- Other special treatments

If you're diagnosed with a blood-clotting disorder, your doctor may prescribe a drug that can increase the proper clotting factor in your blood. Or you may receive replacement therapy, which is an IV treatment to add the proper clotting factor into your blood.