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## **Patient information: Taking care of bruises (The Basics)**

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

**What are bruises?** — Bruises happen when blood vessels under the skin break, but the skin isn't cut. Blood leaks into the tissues under the skin. Bruises start off red in color, and then turn blue or purple. As they heal, bruises can turn green and yellow ([figure 1](#)). Most bruises heal in 1 to 2 weeks, but some take longer.

Bruises can happen when people get hurt, fall, or bump themselves. People usually have pain and swelling in the area of the bruise. Sometimes, the swelling happens right away. Other times, the swelling starts 1 or 2 days later.

Some people bruise more easily and get worse bruises. These include people who have conditions that keep the blood from clotting normally and people who take medicines to prevent blood clots.

**How are bruises treated?** — A bruise will get better on its own. But to feel better and help your bruise heal, you can:

- Put a cold gel pack, bag of ice, or bag of frozen vegetables on the injured area every 1 to 2 hours, for 15 minutes each time. Put a thin towel between the ice (or other cold object) and your skin. Use the ice (or other cold object) for at least 6 hours after your injury. Some people find it helpful to ice longer, even up to 2 days after their injury.
- Raise the area, if possible – Raising the area above the level of your heart helps to reduce swelling.
- Take medicine to reduce the pain and swelling – To treat pain, you can take [acetaminophen](#) (brand name: Tylenol®). To treat pain and swelling, you can take [ibuprofen](#) (sample brand names: Advil®, Motrin®). But people who have certain conditions or take certain medicines should not take ibuprofen. If you are unsure, ask your doctor or nurse if you can take ibuprofen.

You should NOT:

- Put a warm pack or heating pad on your bruise
- Stick a needle or other object in your bruise to drain it

**When should I call the doctor or nurse?** — Call your doctor or nurse if:

- You get a fever
- Your bruise causes your joints to swell
- You can't move or walk because of your bruise
- You get bruises for no reason or have unusual bleeding, such as from your gums or in your urine

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[Patient information: Medicines to prevent blood clots: Warfarin \(Coumadin\) \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient information: von Willebrand disease \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient information: Warfarin \(Coumadin\) \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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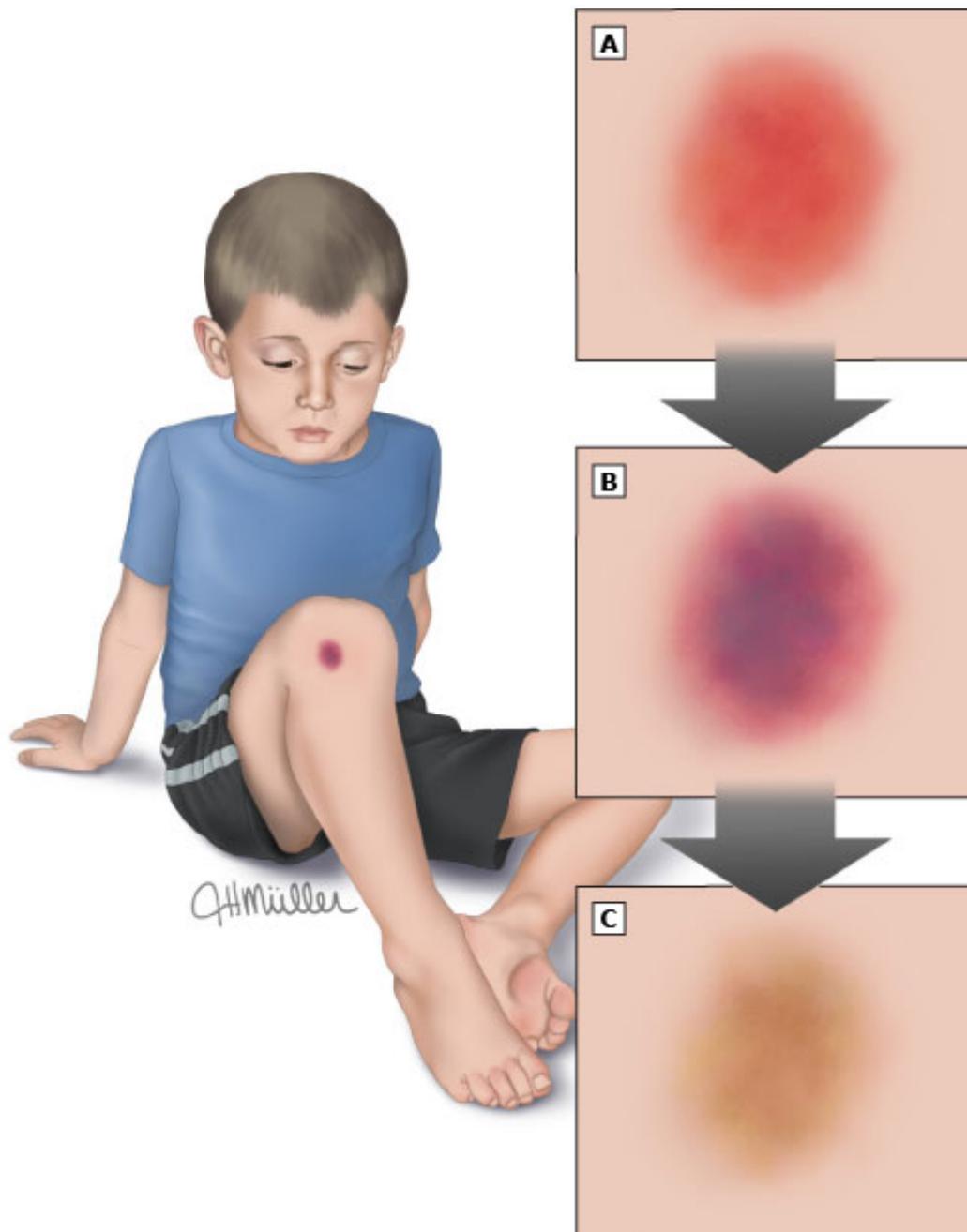
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## GRAPHICS

### How bruises heal

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This drawing shows how a bruise changes color as it heals. A bruise starts off red in color (as shown in A) and then turns blue or purple (as shown in B). As a bruise heals, it can turn green and yellow (as shown in C).