

Blister Care

Blisters are common to anyone who participates in sports and/or outdoor activities. Many people accept blisters as the price paid to play, but there are steps you can take to avoid blisters and reduce the risk of infection and pain if you do get one.

Cause

A blister is a bubble of fluid under the outermost layer of skin. While blisters can occur anywhere on your body, they most often occur on the hands and feet. Blisters can be caused by any number of factors: friction between the skin and shoes, equipment, gloves or socks, or excessive moisture that leads to chafing. Each creates the perfect condition for a blister.

Prevention

To prevent blisters you must reduce friction. Appropriate footwear, including right-sized shoes and socks made from synthetic blends will reduce blister risk. If you develop the telltale "hot spot," make shoe and clothing adjustments as quickly as possible and apply such products as anti-blister or chafing gels to it. Moleskin, a thin cloth barrier applied to the "hot spot", may also help. Try to keep hands and feet dry. Take the time to "break in" new shoes and socks; avoid the test drive during competition or an extended activity.

Caring for a Blister

Once you have a blister, your goal is to keep it from getting larger and to avoid an infection. Small blisters can be left alone; most will drain by themselves. Larger blisters may be cleaned with rubbing alcohol or antibiotic soap and drained with a needle sterilized with rubbing alcohol or by heat. Do not remove the "lid" or top of the blister. Pad the blister with moleskin "donuts" to prevent continued irritation and to relieve pressure.

If the blister's "lid" does rub off, gently clean the area with soap and water, and remove any debris that might lead to an infection. Air-dry or pat the area dry and apply antibiotic ointment to help keep it moist. Cover with a band-aid. You may also consider applying Second Skin™, a band-aid-like product that helps promote new skin growth.

Signs of an infection include red streaks leading away from the blister, warm or hot skin around the blister and pus that may drain from it. Treatment can include antibiotic ointment and a visit to your doctor.

Want to know more? Visit mnsportsmed.org. Minnesota Sports Medicine (MSM) is a network of sports and orthopedic physicians who treat athletes at medical clinics throughout the Twin Cities metro area. To locate a sports medicine physician or for more information about MSM, call 612-273-4800.