

Bruised hand

You have been diagnosed in the Emergency Department with a contusion (bruise) of the hand. This leaflet explains how to care for your hand at home.

How was my bruised hand diagnosed?

The Emergency Department doctor or advanced practitioner has examined your hand and you may have had X-rays taken to rule out a broken bone/ bones (fractures).

What are the signs and symptoms?

Depending on the cause and extent of the injury (e.g. crush injury), you may have significant swelling over the hand and the fingers. This is due to direct trauma to the small blood vessels (capillaries and veins) where some blood leaks into the muscles, tendons and soft tissues of the hand. As a result, you may experience varying degrees of pain, loss of gripping power, reduced ability to bend and extend the affected fingers and sometimes even some numbness or pins and needles. The actual bruising (discoloration of the skin) may appear at a later stage depending on the depth and extent of injury.

What is the treatment of a bruised hand?

- Apply ice over the injury 3-4 times a day during the first few days, especially if it is very swollen. Put the ice in a bag (or use a packet of frozen peas) and apply a towel between the skin and the ice bag/frozen peas. Use only 10-20 minutes at a time with at least 30 minutes in between to allow the hand to feel warm to the touch and have normal sensation before reapplying.
- Keep the swollen hand above the level of the heart to prevent further swelling.
- Take over-the-counter painkillers such as Paracetamol and/or Ibuprofen (Nurofen). Please read and follow the manufacturer's advice for dosage, side effects and precautions. Talk to your GP if you are not sure about taking painkillers.
- Gently massage the affected hand from the fingertips towards the elbow while opening and closing your hand. This will help to keep the swelling down and improve the range of motion.
- Do not lift or carry heavy items in your injured hand while still recovering. This may slow down the healing process or in fact worsen your symptoms.

What to look out for

Seek further medical advice if you experience any of the following:

- Increasing pain, swelling and/or redness – this may indicate infection especially if there has been a break in the skin.
- Failure to improve movement or grip may lead to a 'frozen hand' with loss of function. This could be a result of tendon damage (tendons are the cord-like structures attached to your fingers which help bend and open them) or a build-up of calcium inside the tendon sheaths.

- Excessive swelling from internal bleeding, especially if you are taking blood thinning medicines such as Warfarin.

If in doubt, contact your GP, local Emergency Department or NHS 111

Tell us your views

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your treatment and care, please speak to a senior member of staff or to the nurse looking after you. The matrons are also available during normal working hours and they welcome your views.

Friends and Family Test

Whatever your experience you can give feedback by answering the Friends & Family test question – ‘Overall, how was your experience of our service?’ – by going online www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/friends-and-family-survey.htm.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Emergency Department.

Reviewed: December 2023

Next review due: December 2025