That is going to leave a mark

Bruises are common, but have you thought about what is happening with the body?

When your body sustains trauma from a blunt object, you are likely to have a bruise afterwards. The impact to the skin causes the small blood vessels called capillaries to rupture. This allows the blood that is normally well-controlled within the walls of these small vessels to leak out. This blood cannot get back in, and blood located where it shouldn't be gives the blue or purple color.

If you have just received a bruise, you may feel pain, utter a few choice words and then move on. However, the body's response is worth thinking about.

With the impact and bleeding, first the nerves report the pain to the brain. The damaged cells then release chemicals called histamines. These cells call for help, and the appropriate cells are drawn to this area, much like a blood hound following a scent. With the arrival of these cells, the area swells and becomes red and warm. These cells start the process of rebuilding the blood vessels, but while they do this, the escaped blood causes the darkening and spreading of the bruise.

Over the course of the next two weeks, you will notice that the bruise changes colors, eventually changing to a yellowish color before disappearing. Since the body cannot move these escapee red blood cells back into the vessels, they need to be broken down where they are. As the iron products in the cell are broken down, the cascade of colors occurs.

Bruising can occur all over the body. When it is near the skin, healing is uncomplicated. Severe trauma can cause bruising of the brain, lungs or other internal organs. When this occurs, these organs can no longer function.

Bruises of the brain will swell, and since the skull does not allow the swelling to expand, the pressure increases and permanent damage can occur. If the lungs are bruised, they cannot get needed oxygen into the body.

Bruises visible on the outside of the body may be a sign that bruising has occurred inside the body also. This person should be carefully watched or taken to the emergency room to make sure that there are not other injuries.

What to do? Putting ice on the area cools the temperature of the tissues, and the natural response of the body is to send more blood flow to the area to help warm it. Along with this blood flow comes more cells that are able to help with the healing process. Cooling the tissues will speed up the recovery process.

Gentle massage will also help to increase blood flow. At the same time, elevating the injured area will help the swelling to go down, as gravity will help to move the excess fluid that builds up in the area away so there is less congestion where the body is healing itself.