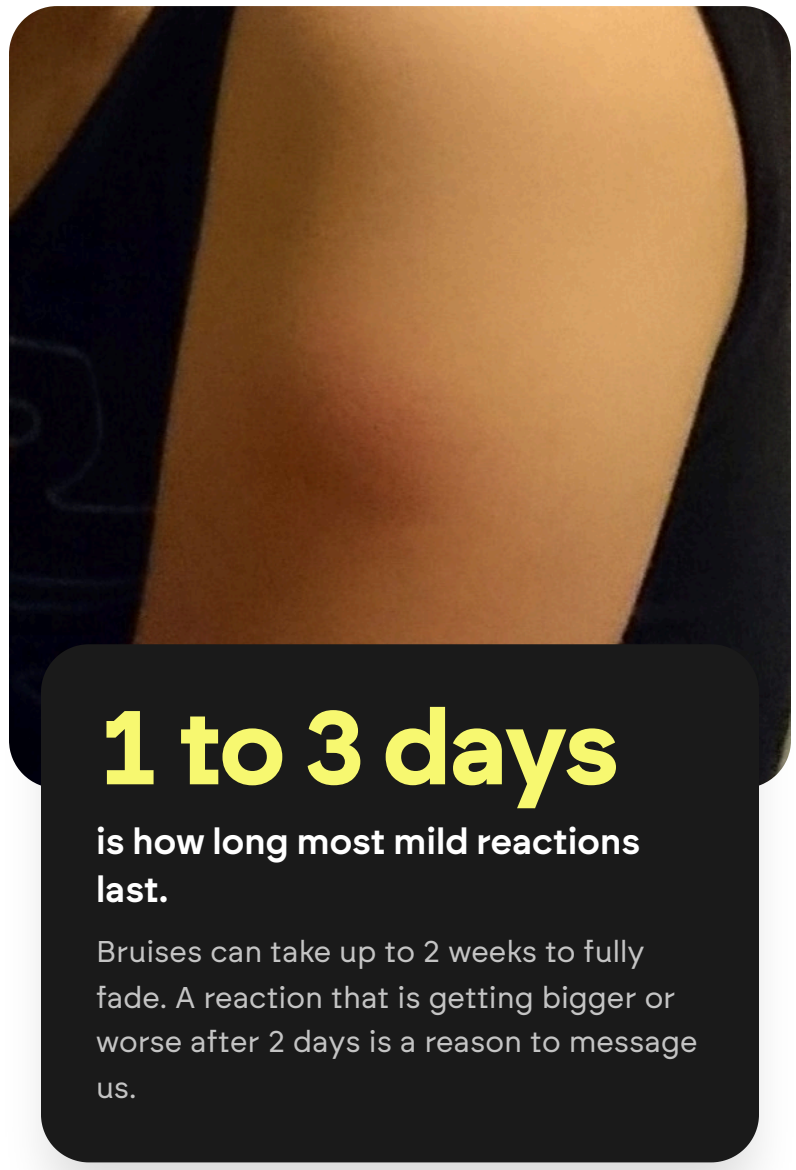
belle

PATIENT GUIDE · GLP-1 CARE

A red spot after your shot? It is usually normal.

Redness, itching, a small bump or a bruise where you inject is called an injection site reaction. This guide explains why it happens, what normal looks like, how to make your shots more comfortable, and when to reach out.

- **It can happen with any shot.** Insulin, vaccines, B12 and GLP-1s can all cause it.
- **It is not a sign your medicine is bad.** It is your body reacting to something being injected.
- **Most reactions fade on their own** and often get milder as your body gets used to your shots.



1 to 3 days

is how long most mild reactions last.

Bruises can take up to 2 weeks to fully fade. A reaction that is getting bigger or worse after 2 days is a reason to message us.

PART 1 · WHY IT HAPPENS

It is not your medicine. It is your immune system.

When a needle goes through your skin and medicine is placed under it, your body notices. Your immune system sends extra blood flow and immune cells to the spot to check it out and start healing. That is what causes the redness, warmth, swelling and itch.

This is a normal, local response to **being injected**. It is not usually caused by an additive or something wrong in your medicine. People get the same kind of reaction from insulin, vaccines, allergy shots, B12 and many other injectable medicines.

GOOD TO KNOW

Reactions are most common in the first few weeks and after a dose increase. For many people they get milder over time. Some people notice a reaction show up a day or two after the shot, not right away. That can be normal too.

The needle itself

Any needle makes a tiny wound. Your body responds the way it does to a small scrape, with a little redness and swelling while it heals.

Fluid under the skin

The medicine takes up space in the tissue until your body absorbs it. That can feel like a small bump or pressure for a short time.

Histamine release

Immune cells in your skin release histamine, the same chemical behind a bug bite. That is why the spot can itch and look pink or raised.

A tiny blood vessel

If the needle nicks a small vessel, a little blood collects under the skin. That is a bruise. It is harmless and fades on its own.

PART 2 · WHAT IS NORMAL

Know what to expect. Worry less.

Here is what common, mild reactions can look like. These photos are from other injectable medicines, because the reaction looks the same no matter what was injected.



USUALLY NORMAL

Redness and swelling

A pink or red, slightly raised patch. It may feel warm or itchy. The coin is a quarter, so this patch is about 2 to 3 inches across.

Photo: Embowafa34, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Reaction to a non-GLP-1 shot.



USUALLY NORMAL

A soft bump the next day

A pink, tender bump that shows up within a day of the shot. It often feels a little firm and sore when you press on it.

Photo: Fluffychen, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Day after a tetanus shot.

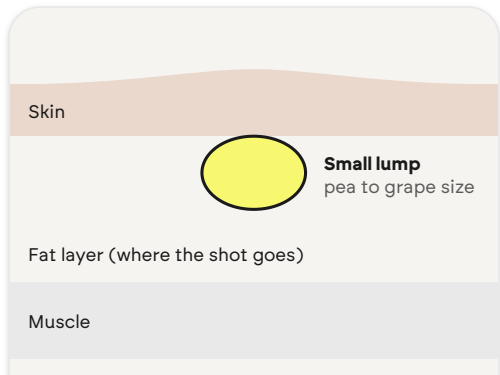


USUALLY NORMAL

A bruise

A purple or blue spot that turns green, then yellow, as it heals. This one is 6 days old. Bruises can take up to 2 weeks to fade.

Photo: Oogle12, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Six days after a vaccine.



USUALLY NORMAL

A small lump under the skin

A pea-sized lump you can feel more than see. It is the medicine being absorbed and usually goes away in a few days. If the same spot stays lumpy, move your shots somewhere else.

On darker skin, redness may look purple, brown or darker than the skin around it rather than red. Swelling, warmth and itch are often easier to notice than color.

How a normal reaction plays out

MINUTES TO HOURS

Sting or a small red dot

A brief sting, a pinprick of blood or a small pink spot.

DAY 1 TO 2

It may peak

Redness, warmth, itch, swelling or a tender bump can be at their most noticeable.

DAY 3 TO 7

Fading

It should look and feel better each day. Itch is often the last thing to go.

UP TO 2 WEEKS

Bruises finish healing

Bruises change from purple to green to yellow, then disappear.

USUALLY NORMAL

- Redness, pink skin or a raised patch **smaller than the palm of your hand**
- **Itching, mild warmth or tenderness** at the spot
- A **small bump or lump** under the skin
- A **bruise** or a drop of blood
- It is **getting better** after day 2

NOT TYPICAL, MESSAGE US

- Redness **larger than the palm of your hand**, or still spreading after 2 days
- It is **getting worse**, not better, after day 2
- **Pus, a blister, an open sore** or skin that turns dark
- A **hard, painful lump** that lasts more than 2 weeks
- Reactions that get **bigger with every dose**

SIMPLE TRICK

Not sure if it is spreading? Draw a line.

Use a pen to trace around the edge of the redness. Write the date and time next to it. Take a photo with a coin next to it for size. Check again the next day. If the redness has moved past your line after 2 days, message your care team and send the photos.

1. **Trace** the edge with a pen
2. **Date** it and take a photo with a coin
3. **Compare** in 24 hours

PART 3 · BEFORE AND DURING YOUR SHOT

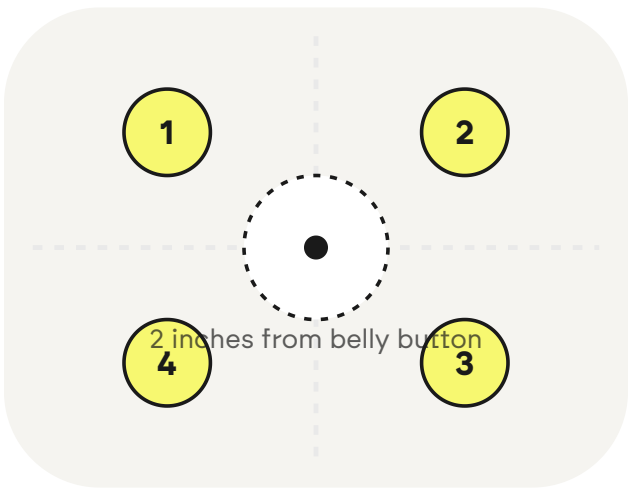
Small changes. Gentler shots.

How you prepare and inject makes a real difference. Most people who get reactions see them shrink once they use these steps every week.

1. Rotate where you inject

Using the same spot over and over is one of the most common reasons for reactions and lumps. Give each spot time to heal before you use it again.

1 inch+
FROM YOUR LAST SPOT



One easy plan for your belly: a new corner each week. Stay 2 inches (about 3 finger widths) away from your belly button.

- **Use all your areas.** Belly, front or outer thigh, and the back of your upper arm all work. Follow the areas listed for your medicine.
- **Move at least 1 inch** (about 2 finger widths) from your last shot, even in the same area.
- **Keep a simple log.** A note on your phone with the date and spot is enough.
- **Skip skin that is not healthy.** Stay away from bruises, scars, stretch marks, moles, tattoos and any spot that is still red or lumpy.

2. Prepare your medicine and skin

Cold medicine and wet alcohol are two of the biggest causes of sting. A few minutes of prep helps.

30 min
OUT OF THE FRIDGE FIRST

A

Let it warm up

Take your pen or vial out of the fridge about 30 minutes before your shot so it reaches room temperature. Never microwave it or run it under hot water.

B

Let the alcohol dry

Clean the spot with an alcohol swab, then wait about 30 seconds until it is fully dry. Injecting through wet alcohol stings and irritates the skin.

C

Numb it first, if you like

Hold an ice cube or cold pack on the spot for 1 minute, or use a numbing cream (see Part 4). Dry the skin and clean it after.

D

Use a new needle every time

Needles get dull after one use. A dull needle tears more skin and hurts more. Never reuse a needle or syringe.

3. Inject gently

Your technique matters. A relaxed, slow shot is a more comfortable shot.

10 sec
SLOW AND STEADY

- **Relax the area.** Sit down and let the muscle go soft. Tense muscle makes shots hurt more.
- **Pinch up a fold of skin** if your instructions say to, so the medicine goes into fat, not muscle.
- **Go in quickly, push slowly.** Insert the needle in one smooth move, then push the medicine in slowly over several seconds.
- **Hold it in place.** Count to 10 before you pull the needle out (or follow your pen's instructions) so medicine does not leak back onto the skin.

RIGHT AFTER YOUR SHOT

- **Do not rub or massage the spot.** It can spread irritation and make bruising worse.
- **Press lightly** with a cotton ball or gauze if there is a drop of blood.
- **Wear loose clothing** over the spot so a waistband does not rub it.
- **Ice it for 10 minutes** if you tend to get reactions.

PART 4 · RELIEF

Already itchy or sore? Here is what helps.

These over-the-counter products can ease redness, itch, pain and bruising. Start with a cold pack. Add one product at a time based on what bothers you most.

AT THE PHARMACY

Shop by the active ingredient, not the brand name.

Find the **Drug Facts** label on the back of the box. The **active ingredient** is what does the work. A store brand with the same active ingredient works the same way and usually costs less.

Drug Facts

Active ingredient	Purpose
Hydrocortisone 1%	Anti-itch

Uses

Temporarily relieves itching associated with minor skin irritations and rashes.

A Cool it down

Cold is the simplest fix and helps almost every symptom. It calms swelling, itch, redness and pain, and can limit bruising. Use cold for the first 1 to 2 days.

START HERE

COLD COMPRESS

Ice pack or cold gel pack

Look for: Reusable gel pack · Bag of frozen peas · Ice in a zip bag

Wrap it in a thin towel and hold it on the spot for 10 to 15 minutes. Repeat a few times a day.

Works in Minutes

Tip Never put ice right on bare skin.

BRUISES ONLY · AFTER 48 HOURS

WARM COMPRESS

Warm washcloth or heat pack

Look for: Microwavable heat pack · Warm, damp washcloth

Once a bruise is 2 days old, gentle warmth can help it fade faster. Use 10 to 15 minutes a few times a day.

Works in Helps a bruise clear over several days

Do not use heat on a spot that is red, hot or swollen. Use cold instead.

B Calm itching and redness

Itch comes from histamine, so anti-itch creams and antihistamines help. Try not to scratch. Scratching makes the spot angrier and can break the skin.

Get reactions every week? Ask your care team if you can take a non-drowsy antihistamine the morning of your shot to head it off.

● GENTLE · ON THE SKIN

ANTI-ITCH CREAM

Hydrocortisone 1% cream

Look for: **Cortizone-10** **Store brand "hydrocortisone 1%"**

A mild steroid cream that calms itch, redness and swelling. Rub a thin layer on the spot 1 to 2 times a day.

Works in A few hours

Tip Use only after your shot, not before.

Do not use on broken skin. Stop after 7 days and message us if it is not better.

● NON-DROWSY · ONCE A DAY

ORAL ANTIHISTAMINE

Cetirizine 10 mg, loratadine 10 mg or fexofenadine 180 mg

Look for: **Zyrtec** **Claritin** **Allegra** **Store brand allergy tablets**

Allergy pills that block histamine all over the body, so they ease itch and swelling from the inside. Pick one and take it once a day.

Works in 1 to 3 hours

Watch for Cetirizine can make some people a little sleepy.

Ask first if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or have kidney or liver disease.

● CAUSES DROWSINESS · NIGHT ONLY

ORAL ANTIHISTAMINE

Diphenhydramine 25 mg

Look for: **Benadryl** **Store brand "allergy" with diphenhydramine**

Strong itch relief that also makes you sleepy. Best saved for bedtime if itch keeps you awake.

Works in 30 to 60 minutes

Watch for Grogginess the next morning, dry mouth.

Do not drive after taking it. Do not mix with alcohol or sleep aids. Ask first if you are over 65.

● GENTLE · SOOTHING

SKIN LOTION

Calamine lotion or pure aloe vera gel

Look for: **Caladryl Clear** **Store brand calamine** **Fragrance-free aloe gel**

Cools and soothes itchy skin. A good choice between doses of hydrocortisone. Keep aloe in the fridge for extra cooling.

Works in Minutes

Tip Pick fragrance-free to avoid more irritation.

C Ease soreness and sting

For a sore, tender spot, a pain reliever can help. If the shot itself is what bothers you, a numbing cream before you inject can take the edge off.

● BEFORE YOUR SHOT

NUMBING CREAM

Lidocaine 4% cream

Look for: **LMX 4** **Aspercreme with Lidocaine** **Store brand "lidocaine 4%"**

Rub a small amount on the spot about 30 minutes before your shot. Wipe it all off, then clean with alcohol and let it dry before you inject.

Works in 20 to 30 minutes

Tip Use a coin-sized area only.

Use only on healthy, unbroken skin. Do not cover it with a heat pack.

● GENTLE ON THE STOMACH

PAIN RELIEVER

Acetaminophen

Look for: **Tylenol** **Store brand "acetaminophen"**

Eases soreness without upsetting your stomach, which is helpful if your GLP-1 already makes you queasy. A typical dose is 500 to 1,000 mg.

Works in 30 to 60 minutes

Limit No more than 3,000 mg in 24 hours unless your care team says so.

Many cold and flu products also contain acetaminophen. Count those too. Ask first if you have liver disease or drink alcohol daily.

● HELPS SWELLING TOO

PAIN RELIEVER (NSAID)

Ibuprofen or naproxen

Look for: **Advil** **Motrin** **Aleve** **Store brand**

Eases pain and also calms swelling. A typical dose is 200 to 400 mg of ibuprofen, or 220 mg of naproxen.

Works in 30 to 60 minutes

Tip Take with food. It can upset an empty stomach.

Ask first if you have kidney disease, stomach ulcers, heart disease, take a blood thinner, or are pregnant.

D Help bruises fade

Bruises are harmless and heal on their own. Cold in the first 2 days and warmth after that is the main plan. Some people also like these.

● OPTIONAL

TOPICAL GEL

Arnica gel

Look for: **Arnicare Gel** **Store brand arnica gel**

A plant-based gel many people use for bruises. Research on how well it works is mixed, but it is low risk on unbroken skin.

Use Thin layer, up to 3 times a day

For the skin only. Do not use on broken skin and never take arnica by mouth.

● CHECK WHAT YOU TAKE

THINGS THAT CAN ADD TO BRUISING

Aspirin, fish oil, vitamin E, ginkgo

Also: **Blood thinners** **Ibuprofen, naproxen**

These can make you bruise more easily. If you bruise a lot, tell your care team what you take.

Never stop a prescribed blood thinner or aspirin on your own.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Your shot-day plan, step by step.

This is a general plan. Your care team may give you one that fits you better.

1

30 MINUTES BEFORE

Prep

Take your medicine out of the fridge. Pick a new spot. Add numbing cream or plan to ice if shots sting.

2

DURING

Inject gently

Dry alcohol, relaxed skin, a new needle, a slow push, and a count of 10 before you pull out.

3

RIGHT AFTER

Hands off, ice on

Do not rub. Ice for 10 minutes if you tend to react. Wear loose clothes.

4

NEXT 1 TO 3 DAYS

Treat and watch

Cold packs, hydrocortisone or an antihistamine for itch. Trace the edge if you are not sure it is shrinking.

PART 5 · WHEN TO GET HELP

Know the red flags. Act fast on them.

Most reactions are mild and go away on their own. A few signs point to an infection or an allergic reaction, and those need care. Do not stop your GLP-1 on your own. Your care team can help you decide what to do next.

Message your Belle care team the same day if:

- Redness keeps **spreading or growing after 48 hours**, or moves past the line you drew.
- The spot gets **hot, more painful or more swollen** instead of better.
- You see **pus or cloudy drainage**, or **red streaks** moving out from the spot.
- You have a **fever of 100.4°F or higher** or chills along with a red, sore spot.
- You see a **blister, an open sore**, or skin that turns **dark purple or black**.
- The reaction is **larger than the palm of your hand**, or lasts **longer than 1 week**.
- A **hard or painful lump** does not go away after 2 weeks.
- Your reactions are **getting bigger with each dose**, or you get hives near the spot.

Send photos with your message. Pictures from the first day and today help us see what is changing.

Call 911 or go to the ER if you have:

- **Trouble breathing**, wheezing or a tight throat.
- **Swelling of your face, lips, tongue or throat.**
- **Hives or a rash spreading over your body**, not just at the shot spot.
- Feeling **dizzy, faint, or a racing heartbeat** soon after your shot.
- **Trouble swallowing**, or vomiting with any of the signs above.
- **High fever with a fast-spreading, very painful red area.**

These can be signs of a serious allergic reaction or a fast-moving infection. Do not wait to see if it gets better. If you have an epinephrine auto-injector, use it and call 911.

PLEASE READ

This guide is general health information. It is not medical advice for you. It does not replace advice from your Belle clinician, your own doctor or your pharmacist. Every person is different.

Always read and follow the label on any product you use, and the instructions that came with your medicine. Talk to your care team or pharmacist before you start something new. This is extra important if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, have kidney, liver or heart disease, or take other medicines.

Photos via Wikimedia Commons: "Copaxone Injection Site Reaction" by Embowafa34 (public domain); "Tetanusimpfung, Tag danach" by Fluffychen (CC BY-SA 4.0); "Moderna arm bruise six days after second injection" by Oogle12 (CC BY-SA 4.0). Photos were resized.