

Blisters can be a real pain

Blisters are caused by friction, usually from your shoes or socks rubbing against your skin. Anything that exacerbates rubbing can start a blister, including a faster pace, poor fitting shoes and socks as well as foot abnormalities such as bunions, heel spurs and hammertoes. Heat and moisture intensify friction by making your feet swell; hence many runners only suffer from blisters during races, especially marathons. Sloshing through water stations and pouring water over your head to cool yourself during running will lead to wet socks and shoes thus causing friction. The body responds to the friction by secreting fluid, which builds up below the part of the skin being rubbed, causing pressure and pain. A blood blister occurs when the friction ruptures tiny blood vessels. While most blisters do not pose a serious health risk, a runner can be sidelined by a painful blister but more importantly, it can also get infected. Serious infections can result from using a dirty needle to pop a blister.

If you have a large blister, drain it to relieve the pressure so that it does not hurt or else it could puncture on its own. To drain the blister, wash your hands and then wipe a needle with alcohol to sterilize it. Do not heat up the needle at all especially in a flame, you will get carbon particles into your skin and can further irritate the wound. Once you've pierced the blister, carefully drain the liquid by pushing lightly with your fingers near the hole and then cover the blister with a tight bandage to keep bacteria from getting in. Take the bandage off periodically and soak your foot in Epsom salts (follow package directions) to draw out the fluid. Change the bandage after soaking; it's a good idea to keep a fresh bandage on until the skin tightens up again.

Leave small blisters intact, the skin acts as a protective covering over a sterile environment. If the fluid amount is small and you try to pop it, you could cause further problems by making it bleed. Leave small blood blisters intact also, otherwise, you risk getting bacteria into your bloodstream. For small blisters, create a protective splint (from cardboard for example) with a hole the size of the blister. Place the splint over the blister and cover it with gauze. The blister will dry out and heal on its own. A blister under a nail is best treated by a medical professional; you never want to deliberately remove the toenail.

The Lynnridge Mall Run / Walk 10km & 5km event takes place this Saturday at 7 am from the Lynnridge Mall on the corner of Jacobson & Lynnwood road. The Rand Athletic Club will host the Sweat Shop/Asics 10 km race this Sunday at 8 am from the Old Parktonian Sports Club on Jan Smuts Avenue in Randburg.