Dear Alice,

I am training for a half marathon and am experiencing chafing from my sports bra on my sternum area. I have tried using Vaseline, band aids, etc. to prevent it, but nothing seems to work. Any suggestions?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Ouch! Sorry to hear that your sports bra is rubbing you the wrong way! Unfortunately, while chafing may be an unpleasant experience, it’s all too common. Whether you’re active and exercising or just lounging around and watching movies, chafing can still manage to creep up on you and cause painful, swollen, irritated, or bleeding rashes. Chafing is typically caused by your skin, clothes, and sweat incessantly rubbing against each other. But fear not — there are some strategies that can help you prevent it, as well as self-care tips to help you heal your existing chafed areas. That said, if you still continue to experience chafing, you might want to speak with your health care provider who can either prescribe medicated ointments or find other methods that could work for you!

Some ideas to treat the area include:

- **Use a mild cleanser**, preferably one that is pH neutral, moisturizing, and unscented.
- **Avoid harsh contact with your skin.** Sometimes chafing can itch, but it’s crucial to avoid scratching, harsh scrubbing, or exfoliating, as all can further irritate the area and prolong healing time.
- **Use gentle and fragrance-free creams to protect the raw skin.** Though Vaseline (petroleum jelly) hasn’t been useful for you in preventing chafing, a thin layer on the chafed area might help guard it from other irritants. Conversely, you can ask a health care provider for recommendations on creams that might work better for your skin type.
- **Regularly monitor the irritation.** Though chafing is often hard to ignore, many people tend to not track its mending progress. If the chafing persists for a couple weeks, it may be best to get it checked out to ensure there are no infections.
To try to prevent chafing in the future, you can directly target chafing triggers with the following possible options:

- **Keep your body and clothes dry.** To absorb extra moisture on the skin, you can gently rub baby powder or alum powder on the affected areas. Additionally, it’s vital to keep your clothes dry and clean, as this can help prevent dried sweat, dirt, and other debris from causing irritation. If you’re very active, prone to sweating heavily, or it’s simply warmer out, you might consider changing your clothes more frequently to help keep yourself dry.
- **Drink lots of water.** By keeping yourself hydrated, your sweat can flow more freely, preventing it from drying into coarse salt crystals that can further irritate your skin.
- **Stay slick.** By using plain lubricants, such as hand cream and body butters, you can help your skin easily glide across your clothes and other body parts. Since petroleum jelly doesn’t seem to be working for you, maybe consider newer anti-chafing gel-based products which are specifically designed for athletes (and are often waterproof).
- **Consider your clothing.** Since friction and sweat may cause chafing, snug-fitting and moisture-wicking clothes can help prevent it. Additionally, clothes primarily made from softer fabrics, such as cotton or silk, or other synthetic fabrics can help. As your bras may be responsible for your chafing, it might help to check that you’re wearing the correct size for you.

Here’s to hoping that friction finally stops being a drag!

Alice!

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