

Taking the "Sting" Out of Jellyfish

On the hot days of summer, jellyfish are making their annual appearance along the coast of Connecticut. Knowing what to do in the event of a sting can make your final beach days more



They're here. Up and down the coast of Connecticut, warmer weather brings those mysterious, at times beautiful, and at times deadly creatures: the jellyfish. From a mild sting to a rush to the emergency room, there are many myths about ways to cure jellyfish stings.

Typically, the jellies that show up in Long Island Sound include the moon jelly, identified by the four horseshoe-shaped marks in the middle, and the reddish-brown lion's mane jelly. One thing that many people don't know is that the phrase "jellyfish" is a misnomer. The creatures aren't fish, as they don't have bones, a brain or other crucial body parts particular to fish.

Most jelly stings are relatively mild, though some -- particularly the Portuguese Man-of-War -- can cause a great deal of pain. However, most stings can be treated simply by rubbing the affected area with vinegar, meat tenderizer or even sand.

Urine has not been scientifically proven to help in jellyfish stings, said Dr. Paul Auerbach, an emergency physician at Stanford University Hospital and an expert on jellyfish stings.

Instead, vinegar is the best first treatment, he said, when treating stings from North American jellyfish.

Experts recommend the following procedures to treat jellyfish stings:

1. **Remain calm!** There are only a few jelly fish whose sting is deadly or potentially deadly.
2. **Get out of the water!** Jellyfish stings can be extremely painful and you could lose your ability to swim.
3. **Remove stingers by applying shaving foam to the sting area.** Scrape the skin closely with a razor, knife blade, or credit card. If you don't have plastic card, rub sand over it to dislodge the stingers and rinse it off in salt water.
4. **Deactivate the remaining stingers (nematocysts).** In the case of a plain old jellyfish sting, pour **white vinegar** on the sting. You can also use salt water or Adolph's **meat tenderizer** to neutralize the venom. Do Not Rub the stinging area. Rubbing the sting will cause more stinging cells to fire and that will just mean more pain.

5. Removing any venom in the skin by applying a paste of baking soda and water and using a cloth covering. If possible, reapply paste every 15-20 minutes. Ice can be applied to stop the spread of venom until either of these is available

6. Take a very hot shower. A 15-20 minute hot shower can deactivate the venom of some jellyfish.

7. Soothe any remaining skin irritations with over-the-counter antihistamine pills or creams containing diphenhydramine. One example is Benadryl. Use ice packs or over-the-counter pain relievers for welts

8. Get medical care if the victim is experiencing any symptoms worse than skin irritation or has issues breathing.

Of course, the best way to handle jellyfish stings is to avoid them altogether. However, if you're heading out to the Connecticut shore or a more tropical destination, be prepared and you'll have a safe and enjoyable day at the beach.

By Janine Wolfe, **About Town Trumbull Patch**, August, 2011