

Taking the heat out of jellyfish stings

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Everyone has their own theory about how to best relieve the pain of a jellyfish sting, however a team of University of Sydney researchers has examined a host of often-used methods to determine which is the most effective.

Their research, published in the *Cochrane Library* this week, has revealed that the best way to relieve the pain of a sting is not vinegar as commonly thought, but hot water immersion.

Senior author of the paper Associate Professor Angela Webster, from the University's School of Public Health, said that despite jellyfish stings being such a common problem in Australia, particularly in the summer months, a summary of good quality research has not existed to guide effective treatment.

"Between 2010 and 2011, there were 40,000 cases of marine sting emergency care around Australia, as reported by Surf Life Saving Australia.

"Many treatments have been suggested to relieve the symptoms of jellyfish stings, however it was unclear which interventions were most effective," she said.

All jellyfish possess specialised stinging cells called nematocysts, which are triggered by physical or chemical stimuli, after which a barb is fired and venom is injected into the victim.

A jellyfish sting may produce a range of signs and symptoms, of varying severity, due to the number of nematocysts which may discharge during a 'sting' and the potential toxicity of the venom.

Milder symptoms of a jellyfish sting include pain and skin reactions (redness and itching at the site of the sting), with more severe reactions including tachycardia and hypertension. The pain of a jellyfish sting can be severe and may last for weeks.

"Our research showed that immersing the sting in hot water was 50 percent more effective than ice packs in relieving pain," she said.

"A hot shower following bluebottle stings is the best treatment for [pain](#).

"Treating the sting with vinegar or Adolph's meat tenderiser compared with [hot water](#) actually made the skin appear worse.

"This research will allow organisations like Surf Life Saving to make evidence-based treatment recommendations and help thousands of people experiencing painful jellyfish stings this summer," Associate Professor Webster said.

Provided by University of Sydney

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