

How to Get Rid of a Hickey

Best of Nonfiction

Ashton Hall

1. Catch the hickey while it's forming; apply firm pressure to the affected area. **-GQ Magazine**

When your girlfriend takes your hand and leads you out of the roller skating rink, you could let go. Head back into the nearly-abandoned building and learn how to skate backwards. Convince her to play the grungy arcade games. Tell her you forgot your purse and then sneak out the window of the women's restroom.

Instead, you let her tug you toward her hand-me-down minivan. You don't protest when she pushes you into the back seat, where the windows are tinted. You force a smile as she straddles your lap and pulls your hands to her hips. You aren't ready, God, *you aren't ready*, but you steady your pale, sweaty palms on her back pockets because you need an anchor to face the hurricane of her desire.

She leans in and devours you. You wore strawberry lip gloss for a goodnight kiss; it's gone in a moment, smeared against her lips and jaw and neck. Her violet fingernails dig into your shoulders as she pulls you in for more, never satisfied with what you offer.

You're nineteen, and you should want this. But you're more focused on the idling bus across the street. And the way your legs are going numb underneath her. And the way her makeup looks more and more like a Jackson Pollock painting every time she pulls back to catch her breath. You're nineteen, and you should be thrilled with the way she moans when she mouths at your neck, but you just want to run.

Finally, her stomach growls, and you pounce on the opportunity. On your last date, she told you she wants you to take charge. Now, even though the command feels like a shirt three sizes too small, you insist on taking a break for milkshakes.

You glance in the side mirror as she drives you to Steak 'n Shake and see the necklace of hickeys she left behind. It's too late to stop them now; they're already under your skin.

2. Massage the affected area with a toothbrush. **-Little Things**

When the Uber drops you off at your apartment, you hurry upstairs and text your little sister, who's gotten a hickey from every boy under eighteen in your two-thousand-person hometown. For the first time, you ask for her advice.

She laughs and says, "Only get hickeys below the shirt."

You throw your phone on your bed and open your laptop. Five articles later, you're standing in your bathroom in your bra, viciously scrubbing your neck with the spare toothbrush you keep under the sink. The articles told you to stop scrubbing when it hurts. You don't. Once you start, you

can't stop until your skin is as raw as a road burn.

It still doesn't feel like you've done enough.

3. Apply heat to the hickey to help the blood reabsorb into the skin.

-Hickey Solution

You stand under the scalding spray of the shower for nearly an hour, rubbing your neck like a genie's bottle, wishing for a miracle when you face the mirror.

You don't blame her for your desire to tear your skin off. No. All those thoughts, the sickness in your stomach, falls back on you like acid rain. Here is a pretty, normal girl who liked you enough to send the first message. Who liked you enough to sneak behind her overbearing parents' backs to talk with you on the phone for hours. Who liked you enough to tolerate your ignorance of flirting-kissing relationships and teach you everything she knows.

So, why do you want to crawl under your bed and never reemerge? Why are you trying to remove every piece of evidence that you're desirable enough to warrant a hickey? Why do you want to block her number?

You step out of the shower into a bathroom filled with oppressive steam. You stand on your rainbow bath mat for a moment, struggling to take a breath. Then, you spin around and turn the shower on full blast again.

4. Apply a cold spoon to the area to prevent more blood from pooling.

-Cosmopolitan

You do everything out of order. The website recommended putting a cold spoon on the hickey immediately, but you only do it after you've tried everything else: toothpaste, peppermint oil, aspirin.

You're good at doing things out of order. That's why you agreed to be her girlfriend on the first date. Why you didn't balk when she said "I love you" during the first phone call. Why you didn't protest when she started planning your suburban life, right down to the number of kids you'd have and the type of dogs you'd adopt, between the second and third dates.

You figure that you'll do all these things eventually, so order doesn't matter. After all, your grandparents met at work, and they were engaged three weeks later. Now they've been married for fifty years. If things happen fast, it's just fate, right? Maybe she's your soulmate and your rapidly unfurling relationship is proof.

That's what you tell yourself at eleven PM when you go to bed that night. It's what you tell yourself at midnight as you stare at the ceiling. It's what you tell yourself at two AM when all you want to do is call your mom.

5. Wait it out and give it time to heal.

- STYLECRAZE

The next morning, you send your girlfriend your usual good morning text, full of flirty emojis and topped off with a saccharine nickname you stole from Google. As she taught you.

You text her during your work break. You send her a picture of a cute dog while you heat your dinner in the microwave. You wish her good night and tell her you love her because you're worried she won't be able to sleep if you don't.

The next day, you send her a good morning text without emojis. You still text her during work breaks. But you pretend to lose your phone all evening because you don't have the energy to tap out replies to her twice-hourly texts.

In the middle of the week, you call your mom, and you pour your heart out like a waterfall. You ask her if she had to *decide* to love your dad. If talking to him felt laborious. If kissing him was just another chore on her to-do list. She laughs because she knows you've already made up your mind; you're just calling for permission.

That night, you leave out the "I love you" in your good night text.

**6. The best way to get rid of a hickey is to not get a hickey in the first place.
- SELF Magazine**

You give it a weekend. You tell her that you're going to be with your aunt and that there's no cell phone service at her house. You do go to your aunt's, and you bike thirty-six miles, and you kayak up a river, and you eat an entire cheese plate.

When you come back on Monday, you ask your girlfriend if you can call her. She calls you instead, two minutes after your text. She asks about your weekend. You tell her about how sore you are from biking. In the same breath, you tell her that it's not going to work.

She tells you she understands. You tell her you're sorry. You hang up the phone.

Instantly, you feel lighter. It's been seconds, and half the weight of the world falls off your shoulders.

Then she calls you back. She's crying. She asks if it's because she came on too strong. You lie and tell her you aren't ready for commitment. She tells you that she doesn't know what she wants from the future, that she's willing to change anything—everything. That she loves you.

You tell her that you don't feel anything, and it's the hardest thing you've ever had to say. When she pauses to take a breath, you hang up the phone. And you block her number. And you block her Instagram account. And you block her on Snapchat. Anything she can do to get in contact with you, you cut off. Because when you're pulling weeds, you can't just trim the leaves. You have to uproot the entire plant.

When you look in the mirror that night, the hickies are gone.