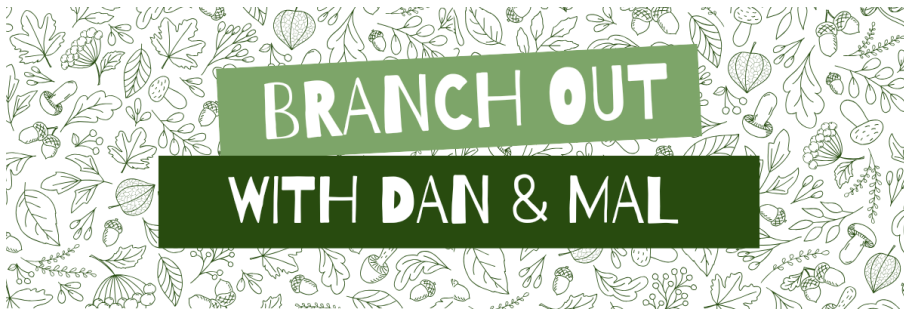




Welcome to Branch Out with Dan & Mal, a weekly newsletter on all things health, wellbeing, and wellness at Midland!

OAKay, Let's Talk...

Mallory's Report:

I always love coming back from breaks to see students looking refreshed and excited about the term ahead. It's hard to believe we only have two terms left in the academic year, and in my first full year at Midland! It's been a whirlwind, but I'm so grateful to be part of this caring and passionate community. Now that the wildflowers are blooming, the birds are building nests, and the frogs are getting vocal, it feels like a spring wonderland. I'm looking forward to many more adventures around campus and beyond.

Dan's Report:

This week has been a very busy one! Many students and faculty have expressed that it's taken a bit longer to readjust back to the daily school schedule, which makes me wonder if it's connected to our being outside of the classroom for the past two weeks - a lengthier timeframe being out of the routine. Either way, the first few days back from any break can be draining and exciting at the same time. One consistent fact that hasn't changed is the tenacity of our students. They have felt tired too and yet they don't back down. They face the day individually, and they get through it together. They seek us out and they seek each other out. Our students truly represent what the word "community" is all about. While these first few days back have been a challenge for me, I can reference several moments in an instant when the courage of our students provided the inspiration and energy for me to remain positive and productive. My theme of the week is definitely gratitude for these impressive young Midlanders!

In a Nutshell -- Deep Dive of the Week

I was part of the MIDterm trip that romped through the Los Padres, mainly through brush and creeks. There were many moments of joy—laughter around the fire at night,

awe at bear and mountain lion tracks, waterfalls and turquoise pools—but one not-so-wonderful part was the poison oak that served as a constant companion along the way.

I've personally never gotten poison oak and wasn't sure if I was even susceptible. A few students on the trip, however, developed very uncomfortable symptoms, which made me curious to learn more about poison oak: how to identify it, how to prevent a reaction, and how to treat one if it happens.

Western poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*) is a native California plant found in woodlands, along trails, in parks, and even in gardens from sea level up to about 5,000 feet. It's a member of the same plant family as cashews and sumac, and it produces an oil called urushiol that causes an itchy, blistering rash in most people. In fact, roughly 50–75% of adults are sensitive to it, and peak sensitization happens between the ages of 8 and 14.

Poison Oak Identification

You've probably heard the saying "leaves of three, let them be." Poison oak leaves typically come in groups of three leaflets, with the middle leaflet on a longer stalk. But it's important to remember that poison oak can change shape depending on where it grows. In sunny, open areas it forms a shrub one to six feet tall. In shaded woodlands, it can climb as a vine up to 75 feet or more using aerial roots.

Additionally, its appearance changes with the seasons. New spring leaves are green or reddish. In summer, the foliage is glossy green. In fall, it turns vibrant shades of orange and red. In winter, the leaves drop entirely, leaving bare stems that can still cause a reaction if damaged.

Preventing a Poison Oak Rash

Urushiol, the oil in poison oak that causes a rash, is found in the stem, root, and leaves. Once on your skin, the oil is absorbed quickly. In fact, in as little as 30 minutes the oil can be fully absorbed into your skin. To prevent absorption, follow these tips:

- Learn to identify poison oak in all seasons and growth forms so you can avoid touching it at all.
- Wear long sleeves, long pants, and high socks when hiking or working in areas where poison oak may be present.
- Once exposed to the oils, the most effective method is forceful, one-direction washing with a damp washcloth and liquid dish soap under warm running water. Do this a few times.
- Washing everything that may have touched the plant, including clothes, gear, shoes, and pets.

Treatment of a Poison Oak Rash

If you do develop a rash, don't scratch the blisters. The fluid inside, despite popular belief, does not spread the rash, but it can lead to infection. To relieve itching, use cool

water compresses, over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream, and calamine lotion.

Poison Oak Myths & Facts

Myth: Touching someone's poison oak rash can spread it to you.

Fact: The rash itself is not contagious. The fluid in the blisters does not contain urushiol. The only way to get a reaction is through direct contact with the oil.

Myth: If I've never had a reaction, I'm immune.

Fact: Sensitivity can develop at any time with repeated exposure. Just because you haven't reacted before doesn't mean you won't in the future. Peak sensitization actually occurs between ages 8 and 14.

Myth: Eating poison oak leaves can build up your immunity.

Fact: This does not work and can cause a harmful allergic reaction. There is currently no proven method of immunization, though a vaccine is in clinical trials.

Source for this Deep Dive: UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program (UC IPM), University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources

Acorny Ending

Look, I know talking about poison oak might seem a little rash, but you don't have to be! With a little knowledge, you can stop this plant from getting under your skin. The best advice is to leave it alone, because if you don't, you might find yourself in a sticky situation. So before you head out on the trails, take a few minutes to brush up on the basics. Trust me, it's worth the itch of effort!

We're on your team—and we're rooting for you.



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