

Insect Stings and Bites: Care Instructions

Overview

Stings and bites from bees, wasps, ants, and other insects often cause pain, swelling, redness, and itching. In some people, especially children, the redness and swelling may be worse. It may extend several inches beyond the affected area. But in most cases, stings and bites don't cause reactions all over the body.

If you have had a reaction to an insect sting or bite, you are at risk for a reaction if you get stung or bitten again.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Do not scratch or rub the skin where the sting or bite occurred.
- Put a cold pack or ice cube on the area. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin. For some people, a paste of baking soda mixed with a little water helps relieve pain and decrease the reaction.
- Take an over-the-counter antihistamine to help relieve swelling, redness, and itching. Calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream may also help. Do not give antihistamines to your child unless you have checked with the doctor first. Read and follow all instructions on the label.
- Be safe with medicines. If your doctor prescribed medicine for your allergy, take it exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. You will get more details on the specific medicines your doctor prescribes.
- Your doctor may prescribe a shot of epinephrine to carry with you in case you have a severe reaction. Learn how and when to give yourself the shot, and keep it with you at all times. Make sure it has not expired.
- Go to the emergency room anytime you have a severe reaction. Go even if you have given yourself epinephrine and are feeling better. Symptoms can come back.

When should you call for help?



Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You have symptoms of a severe allergic reaction. These may include:
 - Sudden raised, red areas (hives) all over your body.
 - Swelling of the throat, mouth, lips, or tongue.
 - Trouble breathing.
 - Passing out (losing consciousness). Or you may feel very lightheaded or suddenly feel weak, confused, or restless.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have symptoms of an allergic reaction not right at the sting or bite, such as:

- A rash or small area of hives (raised, red areas on the skin).
 - Itching.
 - Swelling.
 - Belly pain, nausea, or vomiting.
- You have a lot of swelling around the site (such as your entire arm or leg is swollen).
 - You have signs of infection, such as:
 - Increased pain, swelling, redness, or warmth around the sting.
 - Red streaks leading from the area.
 - Pus draining from the sting.
 - A fever.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not get better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **P390** in the search box to learn more about "**Insect Stings and Bites: Care Instructions**".

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