

# INSECT BITES & STINGS



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Skin eruptions and other symptoms caused by insect bites or stings from mosquitoes, fleas, chiggers, bedbugs, ants, spiders, bees, wasps, hornets, scorpions, and other insects. The victim often doesn't remember being bitten or stung.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Red lumps in the skin. The lumps usually appear within minutes after the bite or sting. Some don't appear for 6 to 12 hours. Skin reactions fall into 2 kinds:
  - A toxic reaction with pain and sometimes fever, such as from bee stings.
  - A toxic reaction with itching due to the body's release of histamine at the site of the bite, such as from mosquitoes.

### CAUSES

The insect bite or sting causes an injection of venom into the skin. This starts a reaction from the body's immune system. The reaction may be mild to severe, depending on how sensitive a person is to the toxin.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Areas with heavy insect infestations.
- Warm weather in spring and summer.
- Lack of protective measures.
- Perfumes, colognes.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- If you cannot avoid exposure, apply insect repellents with diethyltoluamide (DEET) to the skin.
- Wear protective clothing. Apply permethrin to clothing to repel insects and ticks.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Most of the symptoms are mild and go away in 2 to 3 days. Scratching may occur for several weeks. Treatment helps, but it doesn't cure quickly.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- A bacterial infection at the site of the bite.
- Anaphylaxis (life-threatening allergic reaction) for certain super-sensitive persons.
- Scarring on the skin.
- Disorders caused by certain insects. These include Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, West Nile virus, malaria, and others.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- For severe reactions to a bite or sting, get emergency help right away. They can be life-threatening. For most bites and stings, self-care is usually all that is needed.

- Remove stinger. Scrape it out. Don't use tweezers.
- For bee, wasp, yellow-jacket, or hornet stings, rub a paste of meat tenderizer and water into the site.
- For ant bites rub the bite with ammonia; repeat as often as necessary.
- For spider or scorpion bites, capture the insect, if possible, and seek medical help.
- For a tick, use a tweezer to remove it. Put it in a jar with alcohol to kill it. Save it in case more medical problems develop.
- Clean the wound. Apply an ice pack.
- Elevate and rest the affected body part.
- Warm-water soaks help soothe minor pain. Cool-water soaks feel better for itching.
- If you have had anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction) following an insect bite, carry a special kit to treat it in the future.

### MEDICATIONS

- For minor discomfort, you may use:
  - Nonprescription oral antihistamines to decrease itching.
  - Nonprescription topical steroid drugs to reduce redness and soreness and to decrease itching. For face and groin, use only low-potency steroid products without fluorine.
- For serious symptoms, you may be prescribed:
  - Stronger topical steroids or oral steroids if the reaction is severe.
  - Injection of drugs may be needed to prevent or reduce symptoms of anaphylaxis.
- A tetanus shot if needed for some patients.

### ACTIVITY

No limits.

### DIET

No special diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has an insect bite or sting and has a severe reaction. This is an emergency!
- Self-care does not relieve symptoms, or symptoms don't improve after 2 to 3 days of treatment.
- Fever occurs and bitten area becomes red, swollen, warm, and tender. This could mean an infection.

Special notes:

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