

Insect Bites

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.

Signs and symptoms

- Red lumps in the skin. The lumps usually appear in 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, as from mosquitoes.

RISKS INCREASE WITH

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

Preventive measures

- If you cannot avoid exposure, apply insect repellents with diethyltoluamide (DEET) to the skin and 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. Itching may occur for several weeks.

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.

FOR SEVERE REACTIONS TO A BITE OR STING, GET EMERGENCY HELP RIGHT AWAY.THEY CAN BE LIFE THREATENING!

Treatment

For most bites & stings, self-care is usually all that is needed.

- Remove stinger. Scrape it out. Don't use tweezers.
- For bee, wasp, yellowjacket 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 tweezers 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.

Medications

- 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 steroidal products without fluorine.
- For serious symptoms, you may be prescribed stronger topical steroids or oral steroids. Injection of drugs may be needed to prevent or reduce symptoms of anaphylaxis.
- Tetanus shot if needed.

SEE M.D. IF:

- 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.

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