

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.

Skin reactions fall into 2 main types:

- Painful Reactions; (such as those caused by bee stings) cause tenderness, swelling and redness at the site. Itching may also be present in this type of reaction.
- Itching Reactions; (such as those caused by mosquitoes) are the result of the body's release of histamine. Redness and swelling often accompany itching.

Local reactions can be severe but should not be confused with allergic reactions, which can be life-threatening.

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. Reactions typically occur within minutes or may be delayed for hours.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Most symptoms are mild and go away in 2 to 3 days although itching may persist for several weeks. Complications may include:

- Bacterial infection or scarring at the site of the bite.
- Anaphylaxis (life-threatening allergic reaction).
- Disorders caused by certain insects. These include Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, West Nile virus, malaria, and others.

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. Brush or scrape it out. Don't pinch it or use tweezers.
- For bee, wasp, yellow jacket or hornet stings, rub a paste of meat tenderizer and water into the site.
- 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.
- 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 steroids 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 if the reaction is severe. An epinephrine auto injector (EpiPen) may be prescribed for patients with severe allergic reactions.
- Oral steroids may also be prescribed to reduce inflammation.
 - You should begin your steroid prescription today.
 - You should begin your steroid prescription tomorrow.

- Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your steroid prescription, even if you start to feel better.
- Steroids may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Use an alternative method of contraception for the remainder of the month after finishing your antibiotic and/or steroid prescription.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- You experience difficulty breathing or swallowing. This is an emergency!
- Self-care does not relieve symptoms, or symptoms don't improve after 2 to 3 days of treatment.
- Fever occurs or bitten area becomes red, swollen, warm, and tender. This could mean an infection.