

INSECT BITES AND STINGS

Insect and spider bites often cause minor swelling, redness, pain, and itching. These mild reactions are common and may last from a few hours to a few days. Self treatment is often all that is needed to relieve the symptoms of a mild reaction to common stinging or biting insects and spiders. Some people have more severe reactions to bites or stings.

Examples of problems that are more serious include:

A severe allergic reaction. Severe allergic reactions are not common but can be life-threatening and require emergency care. Signs or symptoms may include:

- Shock, which may occur if the circulatory system cannot get enough blood to the vital organs.
- Coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing, or feeling of fullness in the mouth or throat.
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, ears, eyelids, palms of the hands, soles of the feet, and mucous membranes.
- Lightheadedness and confusion.
- Nausea, diarrhea, and stomach cramps.
- Hives and reddening of the skin. These symptoms often occur with other symptoms of a severe reaction.

A toxic reaction to a single sting or bite. Spiders or insects that may cause this include:

- Black widow spider.
- Brown recluse spider.
- Scorpion.
- Puss caterpillar (woolly slug).

A toxic reaction to multiple stings or bites from a bee, wasp, or fire ant.

- A bee leaves its stinger behind and then dies after stinging. Africanized honeybees, the so-called killer bees, are more aggressive than common honeybees and often attack together in great numbers.
- Wasps, including hornets and yellow jackets, can sting over and over.
- A fire ant attaches to a person by biting with its jaws. Then, pivoting its head, it stings from its belly in a circular pattern at multiple sites.
- A large skin reaction at the site of the bite or sting.
- A skin infection at the site of the bite or sting.

If you have had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to bites or stings in the past:

- Carry an allergy kit prescribed by a doctor. If you don't have one, talk to your doctor about getting one. Learn how and when to use it, and keep it with you at all times.
- Wear a medical identification tag to let others know you have an insect allergy.
- Discuss allergy shots (immunotherapy) with your doctor. Shots may be appropriate to control and prevent your symptoms.