

Insect bites and stings

Signs and symptoms of an insect bite result from the injection of venom or other substances into your skin. The venom triggers an allergic reaction. The severity of your reaction depends on your sensitivity to the insect venom or substance.

Most reactions to insect bites are mild, causing little more than an annoying itching or stinging sensation and mild swelling that disappear within a day or so. A delayed reaction may cause fever, hives, painful joints and swollen glands. You might experience both the immediate and the delayed reactions from the same insect bite or sting. Only a small percentage of people develop severe reactions (anaphylaxis) to insect venom. Signs and symptoms of a severe reaction include facial swelling, difficulty breathing and shock.

Bites from bees, wasps, and fire ants are typically the most troublesome. Bites from mosquitoes, ticks, biting flies and some spiders also can cause reactions, but these are generally milder.

For mild reactions:

- Move to a safe area to avoid more stings.
- Scrape or brush off the stinger with a straight-edged object, such as a credit card or the back of a knife. Wash the affected area with soap and water. Don't try to pull out the stinger; doing so may release more venom.
- To reduce pain and swelling, apply a cold pack or cloth filled with ice.
- Apply 0.5 percent or 1 percent hydrocortisone cream, calamine lotion to the bite or sting several times a day until your symptoms subside.
- Take an antihistamine containing diphenhydramine or chlorpheniramine maleate .

Allergic reactions may include mild nausea and intestinal cramps, diarrhea or swelling larger than 2 inches in diameter at the site. See your doctor promptly if you experience any of these signs and symptoms.

For severe reactions:

Severe reactions may progress rapidly. call for emergency medical assistance if the following signs or symptoms occur:

- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of your lips or throat
- Faintness
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Rapid heartbeat
- Hives
- Nausea, cramps and vomiting