

Insect Bites and Stings

Insect bites and stings will usually cause a red, swollen lump to develop on the skin. This may be painful and in some cases can be very itchy. Most insect bites and stings are not serious and will get better within a few hours or days. Some people may have a mild allergic reaction and a larger area of skin around the bite or sting becomes swollen, red and painful. This should pass within a week.

Bugs that bite or sting include wasps, hornets, bees, horseflies, ticks, mosquitoes, fleas, bedbugs, spiders and midges.

How can I avoid bites and stings?

- Remain calm and move away slowly if you encounter wasps, hornets or bees
- Cover exposed skin – if you're outside at a time of day when insects are particularly active
- Wear shoes when outdoors
- Apply insect repellent to exposed skin
- Avoid using products with strong perfumes, such as soaps, shampoos and deodorants
- Never disturb insect nests – if a nest is in your house or garden, arrange to have it removed
- Avoid camping near water, such as ponds and swamps
- Keep food and drink covered when eating or drinking outside, particularly sweet things
- Keep doors and windows closed or put thin netting or door beads over them to prevent insects getting inside the house

How do I treat?

Most insect bites are not serious and can be easily treated at home using the following guidance;

Immediate action

- Remove the sting or tick if it's still in the skin
- Wash the affected area with soap and water
- Apply a cold compress (such as a flannel or cloth cooled with cold water) or an ice pack to any swelling for at least 10 minutes
- Raise or elevate the affected area if possible, as this can help reduce swelling
- Avoid scratching the area, to reduce the risk of infection
- Avoid traditional home remedies, such as vinegar and bicarbonate of soda, as they're unlikely to help
- The pain/discomfort, swelling and itchiness can sometimes last a few days.

Further treatment - If you have troublesome symptoms after an insect bite or sting, the following treatments may help:

- **For pain or discomfort** – Take over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (children under 16 years of age shouldn't be given aspirin)
- **For itching** – Ask your pharmacist about over-the-counter treatments, including crotamiton cream or lotion, hydrocortisone cream or ointment and antihistamine tablets
- **For swelling** – Try regularly applying a cold compress or ice
- **Speak to your pharmacist** - For advice if you're not sure which type of medicine is best for you and your symptoms.

When should I seek further advice?

Contact your pharmacist, call NHS 111, or GP for advice if:

- You're worried about a bite or sting
- Your symptoms don't start to improve within a few days or are getting worse
- You've been stung or bitten in your mouth or throat, or near your eyes
- A large area (around 10cm or more) around the bite becomes red and swollen

- You have symptoms of a wound infection, such as pus or increasing pain, swelling or redness
- You have symptoms of a more widespread infection, such as a fever, swollen glands and other flu-like symptoms

More information is available at the following website

- NHS website - www.nhs.uk
- Or visit your local pharmacy for advice

The 'Be self-care aware' campaign was created by NHS Derby and Derbyshire Clinical Commissioning Group and is reproduced here with their kind permission.