



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Insect Bites and Stings

Bites from insects and spiders and stings from bees, yellow jackets, and wasps usually cause some itching and swelling in a small area. The redness and swelling may be worse in children, acute pain usually doesn't last for more than an hour or two, and general irritation almost always goes away within two to three days. Generally, bites and stings don't cause reactions anywhere else on the body.

Some people, however, have severe skin reactions to insect bites or stings, and a few people have allergic reactions. Their symptoms might include hives all over the body, shortness of breath and tightness in the chest, dizziness, wheezing, or swelling of the tongue and face.

Obviously, the best way to prevent insect stings or bites is to try to avoid contact with insects. Although this might seem impossible, you can help by not wearing perfumes or dark or flowered clothing outdoors since these attract insects. Therefore, you should wear light, solid-colored clothing. You might also cover up with gloves and tuck the bottom of your pants into your socks when you're working outdoors or when you are in other places where insects might be found, such as basements. Finally, consider applying an insect repellent containing DEET every few hours when you're outdoors. But remember to wash it off when you come indoors.

If you've ever had a severe allergic reaction to insect venom, you should carry an emergency kit containing a syringe and adrenalin whenever you might be exposed to insects. You'll want to discuss this preventive measure with your health care professional.

Now, if you do get bitten or stung, here are four tips on how to treat common wounds:

- 1.) Remove a bee stinger by flicking it with your finger. Never squeeze the stinger, as this can release more venom into the skin. If you don't see a stinger, assume there isn't one.
- 2.) Put an ice pack or ice cube on any insect bite or sting. You might also get some relief from baking soda, meat tenderizer, or activated charcoal mixed with a little water.
- 3.) To help relieve the itching, pain, or swelling, try taking an oral antihistamine, such as Benadryl or Chlor-Trimeton. You can also apply calamine lotion, hydrocortisone cream, or a local anesthetic containing benzocaine, such as Solarcaine.
- 4.) Finally, trim your fingernails so you can't scratch the bite, which could cause it to become infected.

On the other hand, if you are the victim of a more serious bite, such as by a black widow spider or a brown recluse spider, put an ice pack on the bite and call your health care professional

immediately. You should also contact your health care professional promptly if you get a blister where a spider has bitten you or if the surrounding skin turns a strange color. Additionally, you should go to the Emergency Room immediately if you start to experience any signs of a severe allergic reaction—such as wheezing, difficulty breathing, swelling around the lips, tongue, or face, or if you are getting other signs that the insect bite is actually making you sick.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION