



Hives

Hives can be (but aren't always) an allergic response to something you touched, inhaled, or swallowed.

Signs & Symptoms

- Red or pink, raised areas on the skin (welts). Each welt can range in size from less than 1/8" to 8" or larger in diameter.



† Courtesy of the Public Health Image Library (PHIL) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Itching
- Hives often appear, sometimes in clusters, on the face, and trunk of the body. Less often, hives appear on the scalp or backs of the hands and feet.
- Swelling on the eyelids, lips, tongue, or genitals may occur.
- Hives can change shape, fade, then rapidly reappear.
- A single hive lasts less than 24 hours. After an attack, though, new ones may crop up for up to 6 weeks.

Causes & Care

Common causes of hives are reactions to medicines, such as aspirin, sulfa, and penicillin and exposure to chemicals and things you are allergic to.

Sometimes it is not known what causes hives. To identify the triggers, keep a diary of when you get hives. List things you expect may have caused the hives.

In most cases, hives are harmless and go away on their own if you avoid what caused them. Self-care helps with symptoms. Prescribed medicines may be needed for severe hives or for attacks of hives that recur.

Your doctor may advise allergy testing if you have hives that last a long time or recur. Emergency medical care is needed for hives that are part of a severe allergic reaction. (See "Signs of a Severe Allergic Reaction" box on next page.)



Self-Care:

- Take a lukewarm bath or shower. Heat worsens most rashes and makes them itch more. Add an oatmeal bath product, such as Aveeno, or one cup of baking soda to the bath water.
- Apply a cold compress.



Hives, Continued

- Wear loose-fitting clothes.
- Relax as much as you can. Relaxation therapy may help ease the itching and discomfort of hives.
- Ask your doctor whether or not you should take an antihistamine and to recommend one. Antihistamines can help relieve itching and suppress hives. Take as directed by your doctor or by directions on the label.
- Use calamine lotion on itchy areas.
- Don't take aspirin, ibuprofen, ketoprofen, or naproxen sodium. These may make hives worse.



Contact Doctor When:

- You have constant and severe itching, and/or a fever with hives.
- Hives last for more than 6 weeks.
- Hives started after taking medicine.



Get Immediate Care When:

Hives are present with signs of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylactic shock).

Signs of a Severe Allergic Reaction

- A hard time breathing or swallowing
- Severe swelling all over, or of the face, lips, tongue, and/or throat
- Obstructed airway
- Wheezing
- Dizziness, weakness
- “Signs & Symptoms” of shock (see at www.HealthyLearn.com)