

How to Cure Insect Stings

Expert
Reviewed

Three Methods: [Treating Insect Stings](#) [Managing Allergic Reactions](#) [Preventing Insect Stings](#)

We might try to avoid it, but sooner or later, most of us get stung or bitten by an insect. Being stung by an insect can be a painful and annoying event. Learning how to treat a bite or sting can help ease any pain and hurry along the healing process.

Method
1

Treating Insect Stings

- 1 Move away from the area of the attack.** Go to a safe place, away from where you were stung, before treating any sting. Assess where and how many times you were stung.^[1]
 - Leave the area quickly and calmly.
- 2 Remove the stinger.** Carefully, use a fingernail or credit-card to scrape the stinger out of your skin. Avoid pulling the stinger out with tweezers, as this may release more venom.^[2]
 - Stingers are usually barbed which is why they stick in the skin.
 - Wasps will not leave any stingers in your skin.
- 3 Wash the wound.** Clean the wound gently with soap and water. Doing this will remove any potential bacteria and lower the risk of infection.^[3]
 - Wash the area gently to avoid further agitation of the sting.
- 4 Treat the wound.** Apply over-the-counter antihistamine creams to the affected area. Using a simple cold compress or putting ice on the area can bring relief as well.^[4]
 - Avoid scratching the area, even if it itches. Scratching will only further irritate the sting.
 - Put an over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream or ointment on the site twice a day for a few days. If the area is very itchy or swollen, take an oral antihistamine such as Benadryl or Zyrtec. Don't use both oral and topical antihistamines together.
 - For any pain, try using painkillers such as ibuprofen, aspirin, or acetaminophen.
 - Soak in cool water. Add a tablespoon of baking soda for every quart of water.^[5]
- 5 Know what the symptoms of a sting are.** Expect swelling, itchiness, or pain for a normal reaction to an insect sting. Severe reactions will bring about symptoms such as wheezing, nausea, hives, or difficulty swallowing or breathing.^[6]
 - A normal reaction will be annoying but not life threatening.
 - A severe reaction will require emergency services.
- 6 Watch the sting closely.** Monitor the sting for signs that it may be worsening. Report to your doctor immediately if you notice any symptoms becoming worse or if you think the area is becoming infected.^[7]
 - Signs of infection include: increased redness, swelling or pain, blisters or drainage from the site, or redness spreading or streaking from the sting site.
 - Pay special attention for stings on the neck or mouth. Swelling here may cause suffocation. Seek immediate medical attention if this happens.

Method
2

Managing Allergic Reactions

- 1 Visit a physician or an allergist.** Ask your doctor to test for allergic reactions to insect stings. Knowing what to expect from a sting will help you monitor and manage any future insect stings.^[8]
- 2 Use an epinephrine pen if you have a severe allergic reaction.** Using the epinephrine pen quickly will help stop the potentially life threatening symptoms. Make sure you follow your doctors instructions exactly when using epinephrine.^[9]
 - Only a doctor can prescribe an epinephrine pen.
 - Ask your doctor when you should use your epinephrine pen.
 - People with severe allergies should always carry their epinephrine pens when outdoors.
 - If you begin to feel the following: tightness in the chest, swelling of the lips, eyelids, or throat, wheezing, hives, vomiting, dizziness or fainting, confusion, or rapid heart rate, difficulty breathing, use your epinephrine pen as soon as you can and get to an ER immediately.^[10]
- 3 Use antihistamines if you have mild allergic reactions.** Take an antihistamine to reduce any non-life threatening reactions to an insect sting, such as swelling, itching, or redness.^[11]
 - Use only as directed.
- 4 Administer first aid to another person with severe reactions.** If you encounter someone who is having a severe reaction to a sting, act as quickly as you can. Take the following steps to deliver first-aid:^[12]
 - Ask them if they have an epinephrine pen, if its needed, and how to administer it.
 - Loosen any clothing that may be tight.
 - Turn the person onto their side if they are vomiting or bleeding from the mouth.
 - Keep the affected area immobile and lower than the heart to reduce the spread of venom.^[13]
 - Call emergency services and begin CPR if the person is not breathing or responsive if you are trained in CPR.

Method
3

Preventing Insect Stings

- 1 Wear long sleeve clothing.** Covering your legs and arms with clothing reduces the area exposed to stings. While you may still get stung through clothes, it will provide more protection than nothing.^{[14][15]}
- 2 Avoid bright colors and strong perfumes.** Wearing bright colors or any strong fragrances can attract insects. Wear neutral colors and do not apply any perfumes when working outside.^[16]
 - Insect repellent will do nothing to stop a disturbed nest from attacking you. However, wearing insect repellent when you may be exposed to stinging insects is still recommended.
- 3 Be vigilant.** Look for any hives as you walk outdoors. Insect hives may be hung in trees or dug out from the ground. Pay attention to any areas of the ground that you see insects swarming or flying around.^[17]
 - If you see a threat, avoid it.
 - Disturbing a nest will induce an attack.
 - Call professionals to remove hornets, wasps, or other stinging insects.

Community Q&A

If a wasp sting is changing colors, what does that mean?



You may be having an allergic reaction. Seek medical help immediately.

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Tips

- If you have a known allergy to insect bites or stings, carry an epinephrine pen with you.^[18]

Warnings

- Any abnormal reactions (besides occasional itch, minor swelling at sting site or pain) should be reported to a doctor right away.
- Call emergency services and use an epinephrine pen if you have one if you experience any symptoms of a severe allergic reaction such as difficulty breathing, swelling of the lips, eyelids or throat, dizziness, faintness or confusion, rapid heartbeat, hives, nausea, cramps or vomiting, or if it's a child stung by a scorpion.^[19]
- Children under 16 years of age shouldn't be given aspirin.^[20]

Things You'll Need

- Ice or cold water
- Bicarbonate of soda.
- Antihistamine.
- Ibuprofen, aspirin, or acetaminophen.

Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-insect-bites/basics/art-20056593>
2. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-insect-bites/basics/art-20056593>
3. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-insect-bites/basics/art-20056593>

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