

## INSECT BITES AND STINGS

### Symptoms of 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.

### What to do

#### To treat an insect bite or sting:

- 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, swelling and itchiness can sometimes last a few days.

#### 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 pack to the affected area, or ask your pharmacist about treatments such as antihistamine tablets

### How to prevent insect bites and stings in the future

- 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