

BEE STINGS

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BEE STINGS YOU

When you are stung by a bee venom composed of proteins and other substances gets injected into the skin. This foreign protein will immediately trigger the body's immune system to respond in order to protect you.

This immune response leads to a typical inflammatory reaction, causing the skin to become red, warm, swollen, painful and itchy. If the itchy area gets scratched, the skin may be broken and can become infected.

A bee sting is different to a sting inflicted by a wasp. When a bee stings, it loses the stinger and dies, but a wasp can inflict multiple stings because it does not lose the stinger.

In some people a bee or wasp sting may trigger an allergic reaction which can lead to death. Death from bee stings is 3-4 times more common than death from snake bites.

WHAT TO DO?

FOR MILD REACTIONS

- Move to a safe area to avoid additional stinging.
- Remove the stinger without squeezing it.
- Wash the area with soap and water.
- Apply a cold pack, ice or cold cloth filled with ice to reduce pain and swelling.
- Take a pain reliever, such as ibuprofen or paracetamol to ease pain from bites or stings.
- Apply a topical cortisone or antihistamine cream to ease pain and provide relief from itching. Calamine lotion can also help to soothe itchy skin.
- If necessary, an oral antihistamine can be taken to reduce the allergic response.
- If the sting area becomes infected, speak to your doctor.
- There are also some first aid sprays available from the pharmacy that can help to relieve the symptoms of stings and bites.

PREVENTION

- As always, prevention is better than cure and stings are best avoided.
- Insect repellents are effective.
- Long sleeves, long trousers, socks, shoes and gloves offer protection from stings.
- Furthermore, look out for insects' nests in and around the home or garden and have them removed immediately.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF EMERGENCY?

Take the following actions immediately while waiting with a victim for medical help:

- Use an autoinjector of epinephrine (EpiPen®) if one is available.
- Loosen tight clothing and cover the person with a blanket. Do not give them anything to drink.
- Turn the person on his/her side to prevent choking if there is vomiting or bleeding from the mouth.
- Begin CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) if there are no signs of respiratory activity, such as breathing, coughing or movement.

FOR SEVERE REACTIONS

Severe reactions affect more than just the site of the bee or wasp sting and symptoms may worsen rapidly. This is known as anaphylaxis. For example, a sting on the tongue may cause throat swelling and can cause severe airway obstruction and difficulty breathing.

Seek emergency medical assistance immediately if the following signs or symptoms occur:

- Difficulty in breathing
- Swelling of the lips or throat
- Faintness and weakness
- Dizziness
- Facial swelling
- Abdominal pain
- A drop in blood pressure (shock)
- Confusion
- Rapid heartbeat
- Hives (swollen pink bumps on the skin)
- Nausea, cramps and vomiting.



DISCLAIMER

TAKE NOTE

The information provided in this article is for education purposes only and does not serve as a medical diagnosis. Members should always consult their healthcare provider with serious symptoms.

Please note that Heritage Health plans do not necessarily cover the costs of the condition/s described.

