

Urticaria

Definition

Urticaria is a very common problem. One person in five will suffer from it during their life (at differing times). Sometimes, it represents a true allergic reaction caused by a food, an animal, a medication, an insect sting, a chemical product or other sensitising agent such as latex. However, most often, urticaria is not allergic in nature. Therefore, you must not be surprised if the allergist suggests that you not do any allergy testing.

Symptoms

- Hives, also known as urticaria, is a kind of skin rash with red, raised, itchy bumps.
- They may also burn or sting.
- Often, the patches of rash move around.
- Typically, they last a few days and do not leave any long-lasting skin changes.
- Fewer than 5% of cases last for more than six weeks.
- The condition frequently recurs.

Causes

- Hives frequently occur following an infection or as a result of an allergic reaction such as to medication, insect bites, or food.
- Psychological stress, cold temperature, or vibration may also be a trigger.
- In half of cases, the cause remains unknown.

Risk factors include having conditions such as hay fever or asthma.

Diagnosis is typically based on the appearance. Patch testing may be useful to determine the allergy.

Prevention is by avoiding whatever it is that causes the condition.

Treatment is typically with antihistamines such as diphenhydramine and ranitidine.

- In severe cases, corticosteroids or leukotriene inhibitors may also be used. (Prescribed by HCW).
- Keeping the environmental temperature cool is also useful.
- For cases that last more than six weeks, immunosuppressants such as ciclosporin may be used.
- About 20% of people are affected.

Reference:

The Association of Allergists and Immunologists of Québec
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hives>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT URTICARIA

1. What is the best treatment for urticaria?

Antihistamines are the best first-line treatment for hives. These drugs work by suppressing histamine, a chemical produced by the immune system that instigates the symptoms of allergy. For most types of urticaria, an over-the-counter (OTC) antihistamine may provide ample relief.

2. How long does urticaria last?

Usually, eruptions may last for a few minutes, sometimes several hours, and even several weeks to months. Most individual hives last no more than 24 hours. Acute episodes of urticaria last for six weeks or less.

3. Why is urticaria dangerous?

Chronic urticaria (hives for more than six weeks) is not dangerous. Sometimes hives occur with angioedema (swelling). Usually the cause of chronic urticaria cannot be identified. Allergy is not typically a cause of chronic urticaria.

4. Which foods should be avoided if one has urticaria?

Histamine-rich foods such as:

- cheese,
- yogurt,
- preserved meats,
- fruits such as strawberries and cherries,
- spinach, tomatoes, and brinjal,
- alcoholic beverages,
- fermented foods, and
- fast food.

5. Why is urticaria worse at night?

Along with your body's natural circadian rhythms, a number of different health conditions can cause itchy skin to become worse at night:

- Skin diseases such as atopic dermatitis (eczema), psoriasis, and hives
- Bugs like scabies, lice, bed bugs, and pinworms.
- Kidney or liver disease

6. How do I permanently get rid of urticaria?

- Home remedies
- Bathing in an anti-itch solution: Oatmeal and baking soda baths can soothe skin and reduce irritation.
- Applying aloe vera: The healing properties of aloe vera may soothe and reduce hives.
- Avoiding irritants: This includes avoiding perfumes, fragranced soaps or moisturisers, and staying out of the sun.
- Chronic hives may be due to an immune response, which is triggered by factors like heat, extreme exercise, or alcohol use. Stress can also cause hives and can make hives you already have even worse.