

Home remedies: stung by a bee

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Credit: Lilla Frerichs/public domain

In most cases, bee stings are just annoying, and home treatment is all that's necessary to ease the pain of bee stings. But if you're allergic to bee stings or you get stung numerous times, you may have a more-serious reaction that requires emergency treatment.

Bee stings can produce different reactions, ranging from temporary pain and discomfort to a severe allergic reaction. Having one type of reaction

doesn't mean you'll always have the same reaction every time you're stung, or that the next reaction will necessarily be more severe.

You're more likely to have an allergic reaction to bee stings if you've had an allergic reaction to a bee sting in the past, even if it was minor. Adults tend to have more-severe reactions than children do and are more likely to die of anaphylaxis than children are.

Most of the time, bee sting symptoms are minor and include:

- Instant, sharp burning pain at the sting site
- A red welt at the sting area
- Slight swelling around the sting area

In most people, the swelling and pain go away within a few hours.

TREATMENT FOR MINOR REACTIONS

- Remove the stinger as soon as you can, as it takes only seconds for all of the venom to enter your body. Get the stinger out any way you can, such as with your fingernails or tweezers.
- Wash the sting area with soap and water.
- Apply a cold compress.

MODERATE REACTION

Some people who get stung by a bee or other insect have a bit stronger reaction, with signs and symptoms such as:

- Extreme redness
- Swelling at the site of the sting that gradually enlarges over the next day or two

Moderate reactions tend to resolve over five to 10 days. Having a moderate reaction doesn't mean you'll have a severe allergic reaction the next time you're stung. But some people develop similar moderate reactions each time they're stung. If this happens to you, talk to your doctor about treatment and prevention, especially if the reaction becomes more severe each time.

TREATMENT FOR MODERATE REACTIONS

The following steps may help ease the swelling and itching often associated with large local reactions: Remove the stinger as soon as you can.

- Wash the affected area with soap and water.
- Apply a cold compress.
- Take an over-the-counter pain reliever as needed. You might try ibuprofen (Motrin IB, Children's Motrin, others) to help ease discomfort.
- If the sting is on an arm or leg, elevate it.
- Apply hydrocortisone cream or calamine lotion to ease redness, itching or swelling.
- If itching or swelling is bothersome, take an oral antihistamine that contains diphenhydramine (Benadryl) or chlorpheniramine (Chlor-

Trimeton).

- Avoid scratching the sting area. This will worsen itching and swelling and increase your risk of infection.

SEVERE ALLERGIC REACTION

A severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to bee stings is potentially life-threatening and requires [emergency treatment](#). A small percentage of people who are stung by a bee or other insect quickly develop anaphylaxis. Signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis include:

- Skin reactions, including hives and itching and flushed or pale skin
- Difficulty breathing
- Swelling of the throat and tongue
- A weak, rapid pulse
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Dizziness or fainting
- Loss of consciousness

People who have a severe allergic reaction to a bee sting have a 30 to 60 percent chance of anaphylaxis the next time they're stung. Talk to your doctor or an allergy specialist about prevention measures such as immunotherapy ("allergy shots") to avoid a similar reaction in case you get stung again.

Make an appointment to see your doctor if:

- Bee sting symptoms don't go away within a few days
- You've had other symptoms of an allergic response to a bee sting

In most cases, bee stings don't require a visit to your doctor. In more-severe cases, you'll need immediate care.

Call 911 or other emergency services if you're having a serious [reaction](#) to a bee sting that suggests anaphylaxis, even if it's just one or two signs or symptoms. If you were prescribed an emergency epinephrine autoinjector (EpiPen, Auvi-Q, others), use it right away as your doctor directed.

Seek prompt medical care if you've been swarmed by [bees](#) and have multiple stings.

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