

Hives (urticaria)

What is it?

Hives, also known as urticaria, is a very common skin rash that can affect people at any age. It causes very itchy, red bumps anywhere on the skin. These bumps come and go, with individual bumps lasting from a few minutes to 24 hours, and clearing without leaving a mark on the skin.

In most people, hives settle within days to less than 6 weeks (acute urticaria). While many causes of acute urticaria are unknown, the more common triggers include infection, insect venom, medications/drugs and foods. Acute urticaria can sometimes be associated with lip and eyelid swelling (angioedema).

Less commonly, hives can last more than 6 weeks (chronic urticaria). Chronic urticaria can happen for no reason, or be caused by various triggers like scratching, hot/cold water, pressure, vibration, heat or sun exposure. Chronic urticaria is more common in those with autoimmune disease (especially thyroid) in themselves or family members. There are other uncommon medical causes of chronic urticaria that you may be tested for.



What can I do to help my hives?



- ✗ Avoid overheating the skin. Don't overdress and avoid hot showers/baths.
- ✗ Avoid clothing made from prickly and rough materials, this includes wool, nylon, synthetics.
- ✗ Avoid products that dry the skin. Try not to use soap, shower gel, shampoo or bubble bath for washing.
- ✓ Try to reduce stress and worry.
- ✗ Avoid medications and drugs that make hives worse, this includes aspirin, ibuprofen and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), codeine and other opiates, and alcohol.

Avoid other known triggers for your hives:

Hives (urticaria)

What everyday skin care is best for my hives?

Use either plain water or a soap-free wash in the bath or shower.

Keep the skin well moisturised by applying a cream all over the skin each day. It is best to put the moisturiser on straight after washing, directly on to damp skin.

A menthol-containing cream can be used as often as is needed for its cooling, anti-itch effect on the skin.



What specific treatment should I use for my hives?

A steroid ointment can sometimes help with the itchy rash. This can be applied 1-2 times daily to the rash until it clears.

Non-drowsy H1-antihistamines are the most effective treatment for hives. The aim of this treatment is to stop new areas of rash appearing. Sometimes this means increasing the dose of the anti-histamine, as directed by your doctor.



Occasionally other treatments are needed. **Today you have also been prescribed.**



Patients with chronic urticaria may require other treatments, including phototherapy, tablets, injections.

Want more information? Visit dermnetnz.org or dermcoll.edu.au/a-to-z-of-skin

This factsheet was developed as part of the Koolungar Moorditj Healthy Skin Project.