

Hives and Angioedema

Hives are very common. In fact, 10-20% of people will experience hives at least once in their lives. The most common complaint is the itching, which may also feel like burning or stinging. In most cases, hives and angioedema are harmless and don't leave any lasting marks.

Q: What are hives?

A: Hives are red, bumpy, and very itchy rashes that can arise anywhere on the body.

Q: What is angioedema?

A: Angioedema is a form of hives that develops in the deeper tissues causing significant swelling. This occurs most commonly on the face. Rapidly developing angioedema is considered a medical emergency. It can be life-threatening if the swelling causes your throat or tongue to block your airway and leads to loss of consciousness.

Q: What are the symptoms?

A: Signs and symptoms of hives include:

- Raised red or white welts (wheals, or swellings) of various sizes that can cover large areas of skin
- Welts that resolve while new welts erupt, making it seem as if the condition "moves"
- Itching, which may be severe
- Rarely, burning or stinging

Q: Is it true hives can move to other parts of your body?

A: Yes, hives have a tendency to migrate around the body. An area of redness or itching may last just a few hours in one spot before fading away and developing somewhere else.

Q: Are all hives the same?

A: Actually, no! There are different categories of hives.

- **Acute hives** are categorized as "acute" if they last less than 6 weeks. This type of hives is usually caused by an allergic reaction or viral infection.
- **Chronic hives** last more than 6 weeks and are less likely to be due to an allergy. They may be caused by stress, autoimmune disorders, hormonal changes or some other systemic problem. Certain types of hives develop in response to being hot and sweaty. This can follow exposure to sunlight, exercise, hot baths, blushing or episodes of anger.
- **Dermatographism** is a form of localized hives that develops in the area where the skin is scratched, and is quite common.

Q: I've experience hives. They go away, but then reappear. What triggers this?

A: Acute hives go away after a few days or week, but may return again after exposure to the allergic trigger. Common triggers of hives include foods (peanuts, chocolate, fish, tomatoes, eggs, and milk), insect stings and medications (penicillin, sulfa drugs).

Q: What is the treatment for hives?

A: When the cause of hives is known, the most important step is to eliminate the trigger.

When the cause is unknown, medications - often is antihistamines - can provide relieve from the symptoms.

You should consult a physician if your hives do not respond to treatment, if you experience severe discomfort, or if your symptoms continue for more than a few days. For more information or for a consultation call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry (843) 689-5259 on Hilton Head Island or 843-705-0840 in Bluffton / Okatie.