

PATIENT EDUCATION

HIVES (URTICARIA)

Patient education: Hives (urticaria)

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HIVES OVERVIEW — "Urticaria" is the medical term for hives. Hives are raised areas of the skin that itch intensely and are red with a pale center. Hives are a very common condition. About 20 percent of people have hives at some time during their lives.



HIVES SYMPTOMS

Skin appearance — Hives are raised areas that itch intensely and are sometimes red with a pale center. In some cases, the raised areas enlarge and merge together. Itching is usually the most bothersome symptom of hives, and it may be severe enough to interfere with work and sleep.

Most cases of hives will not last more than **2 weeks**. (Infrequently, may last up to 6 weeks.)

Most often the cause of hives in children is difficult to identify. Testing is usually not recommended.

The most common causes in children are **Insect bites and Viral Infections**.

Viral infections (Common Cold) cause more than 80 percent of all cases of hives in children.

Urticaria is a sign of the immune system clearing the viral infection, sometimes one week or more after the illness begins.

Other less common causes are **Medications, Food allergies, Physical contact to irritants**.

When to consider blood testing or when to follow up with Dr. Nagamine?

- 1) **If hives are lasting longer than six weeks,**
- 2) **If severe despite medications.**

However, it is important to remember the following:

- Hives are not contagious
- Hives commonly COME AND GO FOR 2 WEEKS
- Most resolve by SIX WEEKS
- Hives are rarely caused by allergies and are not life-threatening
- **HIVES TESTING** — **Most people with hives do not need any testing.** Tests may be recommended if hives do not resolve within **six weeks**.

HIVES TREATMENT

- 1) **Antihistamines** — Antihistamines are medicines that can relieve itching. Most people with hives are helped with antihistamines. (But Hives may still “Come and Go.”)
 - Loratadine (Claritin [brand name] and generic)
 - Cetirizine (Zyrtec [brand name] and generic)
- 2) **Oral steroids** (glucocorticoids), such as prednisone, can help to relieve severe acute hives that do not get better with antihistamines. Once the hives have improved, the steroid dose is gradually lowered and then stopped.

Emergency Symptoms

Severe pain, blood blister-like spots, and bruising of the skin are **not** typical of hives. Having hives along with a fever and joint pains is also **not** typical. These symptoms suggest a different condition which requires a different treatment.

Hives as part of a serious allergic reaction — Hives can also occur as part of a more serious allergic reaction. Symptoms needing emergency evaluation are Severe Hives or swelling along with other symptoms, such as:

- Trouble breathing
- Tightness in the throat
- Nausea or vomiting
- Cramping abdominal pain
- Passing out
- Severe generalized skin redness.

