

HIVES

This is a very common condition and affects up to 20% of the population.

Symptoms include itchy, red welts that appear over the body and then fade, abnormal swelling around the eyes or lips, and sometimes wheezing. These symptoms often worsen with scratching.

Hives are not contagious, and the exact cause of hives is often difficult to determine.

Common factors include:

- Drug allergy
- Infections (hepatitis, mononucleosis, etc.)
- Food allergy (seafood, strawberries, chocolate, nuts, tomatoes, etc.)
- Bee sting allergy
- Environmental factors (heat or cold exposure, pollen allergies)
- Emotional distress
- Alcohol intake

Oral antihistamine drugs are usually very helpful in controlling the symptoms, and should be used on a regular basis for 7-10 days. More severe cases may require the use of cortisone drugs. A cool bath may help you feel better. For hives triggered by pollen or animal dander allergy, take a shower as soon as possible after exposure.

Avoid any substances known to cause this reaction, and do not take aspirin, narcotic medicines, or alcohol because these can make your condition worse. Call your doctor or nurse practitioner if your hives do not begin to clear up within one week.

Call or go to the **emergency room** immediately if you have any of the following:

- Trouble breathing or swallowing
- Fainting
- Swelling of the tongue
- Unusual pain

