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## Allergy symptoms: Hives, rashes and swelling

Hives, also known as [Urticaria](#), are an outbreak of swollen, pale red bumps, patches, or welts on the skin that appear suddenly. This forms the **rash**. A rash involves a change in the color and texture of your skin. Often there are patches of redness that is first noticed. This may be caused by an allergy or for other reasons. Hives usually itch but they may also burn or sting. They can appear anywhere on the body, including the face, lips, tongue or ears. Hives vary in size ( from a pencil eraser size to a dinner plate) and they may join together forming larger areas known as plaques. They can last for hours, or up to several days before fading.

A simple rash is called dermatitis, meaning inflammation of the skin.

Allergies may cause swelling beneath the surface of the skin. This is called *angioedema*. Angioedema is characterized by deep swelling around the eyes and lips and sometimes of the genitals, hands, and feet. It generally lasts longer than hives, but the swelling usually goes away in less than 24 hours.

### What Causes Hives and Angioedema?

Hives and Angioedema form when, in response to histamine, blood plasma leaks out of small blood vessels in the skin. **Histamine is a chemical released from specialized cells along the skin's blood vessels.** Allergic reactions, chemicals in foods, insect stings, sunlight exposure, or medicines can cause histamine release. Sometimes it's impossible to find out exactly why hives have formed.

Hives or swelling lasting less than six weeks is usually caused by foods, (See the chart for common foods), medicines, latex, or infections. Insect bites and internal disease may also be responsible.

Fresh foods cause hives more often than cooked foods. Certain food additives and preservatives may also be to blame. Medicines may also be responsible for hives and Angioedema.

#### COMMON FOODS THAT MAY CAUSE HIVES

- Nuts
- Chocolate
- Fish
- Tomatoes
- Eggs
- Fresh berries
- Soy
- Wheat



Hives may be caused by the skin being directly exposed to cold, heat, the sun, vibration, pressure, sweating, and exercise.

[Contact dermatitis](#) is caused by things your skin touches, such as:

- Chemicals in elastic, latex, and rubber products
- Cosmetics, soaps, and detergents
- Dyes and other chemicals in clothing
- [Poison ivy, oak, or sumac](#)

Hives and swelling that last more than six weeks are known as a chronic condition. The cause of this is usually more difficult to identify. The causes may be similar but they can also include autoimmunity, chronic infections, hormonal disorders, and malignancy.

[Seborrheic dermatitis](#) is a rash that appears in patches of redness and scaling around the eyebrows, eyelids, mouth, nose, the trunk, and behind the ears. If it happens on your scalp, it is called dandruff in adults and cradle cap in infants.

Age, stress, fatigue, weather extremes, oily skin, infrequent shampooing, and alcohol-based lotions aggravate this harmless but bothersome condition.

Other common causes of a rash include:

[Eczema](#) (atopic dermatitis) -- tends to happen in people with allergies or asthma. The rash is generally red, itchy, and scaly.

[Psoriasis](#) -- tends to occur as red, scaly, itchy patches over joints and along the scalp. Fingernails may be affected.

Other causes continued ►

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**Impetigo** -- common in children, this infection is from bacteria that live in the top layers of the skin. Appears as red sores that turn into blisters, ooze, then crust over.

**Shingles** -- a painful blistered skin condition caused by the same virus as chickenpox. The virus can lie dormant in your body for many years and re-emerge as shingles.

Childhood illnesses such as [chicken pox](#), [measles](#), [roseola](#), [rubella](#), [hand-foot-mouth disease](#), [fifth disease](#), and [scarlet fever](#).

Medications and [insect bites or stings](#).

## HOME CARE

Most simple rashes will improve with gentle skin care and avoiding irritating substances. Follow these general guidelines:

- Avoid scrubbing your skin.
- Use as little soap as possible. Use gentle cleansers instead.
- Avoid applying cosmetic lotions or ointments directly on the rash.
- Use warm (not hot) water for cleaning. Pat dry, don't rub.
- Eliminate any newly added cosmetics or lotions.
- Leave the affected area exposed to the air as much as possible.
- Hydrocortisone cream (1%) is available without a prescription and may soothe many rashes

Try calamine medicated lotion for poison ivy, oak, or sumac as well as other types of contact dermatitis

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## TREATMENT

Your healthcare provider will need to ask many questions as the best treatment is to identify and remove the cause. However, this is not an easy task.

Antihistamines are usually prescribed by your healthcare provider to relieve the symptoms of itching, pain, redness and to help reduce the hives and associated swelling from forming. Over-the-counter antihistamines are available and may be used according to the package instructions.

Chronic hives may be treated with antihistamines or a combination of medications, on a regular schedule.

### **Contact a Medical Professional if :**

- You are short of breath
- Your face is swollen
- You have joint pain, fever, or a sore throat
- You have streaks of redness, swelling, or very tender areas as these may indicate an infection
- You are taking a new medication -- DO NOT change or stop any of your medications without talking to your doctor
- You may have a tick bite
- Home treatment doesn't work, or your symptoms get worse

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Merckmedicus, Adult Health Advisor 2009.4: *Wound Closure and Wound Care*

WebMD. Allergies and Hives, 2009

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## ALLERGIES



## Hives and Rashes

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