



Urticaria (Hives)

Urticaria (hives) is a very common disease. About 20% of all people will have hives during their lifetime. On any given day, 25 out of every 1,000 people will have hives. A hive is caused when blood plasma leaks through tiny spaces in small blood vessels. Often there is no obvious cause for hives.

50% of all cases will clear in a few days or weeks. 25% will clear in a few months. The remaining 25% may be continual or recurrent, with problems lasting up to several years.

Acute Urticaria is a single attack of hives, which lasts from a few days to 3 or 4 weeks. This type of hives is most often associated with a medication or an infection.

Chronic Urticaria is a continual attack or frequent episodes of hives lasting for more than six months. It is difficult to find an exact cause of this type of hives. Sometimes chronic hives are associated with physical factors such as rubbing or pressure on the skin, cold exposure, sunlight exposure, heat or sweating. Other causes may be reactions to foods, medications, or long-lasting infections.

Treatment:

- Your doctor will first take a thorough and detailed history. This is usually how a cause for hives is discovered. Be sure you inform your doctor of any medication you are taking, both prescription and over-the-counter. Include vitamins, health foods, laxatives, etc.
- Avoid aspirin, ibuprofen, and drugs, which combine either of these with another medication (such as Anacin, Ascriptin, Bufferin, Ecotrin, Doan's Pills etc.). These drugs may make your hives worse. Always read the label when you buy over-the-counter medications. Aspirin may be listed as acetyl salicylic acid or ASA.
- Avoid heat, hot showers, tight clothes, excessive rubbing or scratching and stressful situations.
- There are several oral antihistamines which can help relieve the itch of hives. Antihistamines are usually tried before any other medication. The antihistamines are very safe; however, some can cause drowsiness.
- If the hives are chronic and do not respond well to medications, some laboratory tests may be completed. Generally, extensive laboratory tests are not recommended.