

## **What You're Itching to Know about Bug Bites**

From bees and wasps to mosquitoes and ticks, there is no shortage of outdoor party invaders during the summer months. Before you head to your next barbeque, learn how you can protect you and your family from insect bites and stings, and keep enjoying those long summer nights.

“Insect bites and stings are extremely common,” says our resident osteopathic physician. “Stings from bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets and fire ants are typically the most troublesome. Bites from mosquitoes, ticks and biting flies also can cause reactions, but these are generally milder.” He adds.

Since bites and stings are an injection of venom or other substances into your skin, the injection can sometimes trigger an allergic reaction. “The severity of your reaction depends on your sensitivity to the insect venom or substance and whether you've been stung or bitten more than once,” says our doctor.

According to the doctor, most bites and stings will only result in mild discomfort for a short period of time.

“Typically the signs and symptoms of an insect bite are redness, swelling and itching that disappear within a day or so,” he says.

A small percentage of people experience a severe reaction. According to the doctor, symptoms of a severe reaction can include:

- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Chest tightness or pain
- Nausea
- Difficulty swallowing
- Faintness or weakness
- Abdominal pain
- Deterioration of blood pressure and circulation (shock)

“If you experience any of these symptoms, or have a history of severe reactions, you should seek medical attention immediately,” the doctor says.

A sting in the mouth is also serious. “Because stings in oral mucous membranes can quickly cause severe swelling that may block airways, it is important to monitor them very closely and see a doctor immediately if swelling begins,” explains our doctor.

To treat milder symptoms like redness and pain, you can apply ice to the affected area. Our consulting doctor recommends cleaning the area with soap and water to remove contaminated particles left behind by some insects, such as mosquitoes. “These particles may further contaminate the wound if not removed,” he says.

To treat itching, our doctor recommends applying an over-the-counter antihistamine such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) in cream or pill form or Calamine lotion. “You should refrain from scratching because this may cause the skin to break and an infection to form” he adds.

If symptoms do not improve after performing the measures above and the area appears more red, hot, and tender, our doctor recommends consulting a physician for further evaluation of infection.

To protect you and your family from insect bites and stings this summer, the doctor suggests the following:

- Avoid outdoor activity during the most active time for mosquitoes, which is at dawn and dusk, or in the evening
- Minimize areas of exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants
- Apply insect repellent to skin, clothing, shoes, tents, etc.
- Keep an eye out for hives and nests and avoid them

“It’s almost impossible to protect yourself completely from insect bites and stings,” concludes our consulting physician. “But, as long as you take measures to prevent them from happening in the first place, and know what symptoms to watch for, you can be quite effective in diminishing the chances of anything serious happening.”

Preventive medicine is just one aspect of care osteopathic physicians provide. DOs are fully licensed to prescribe medicine and practice in all specialty areas, including surgery. DOs are trained to consider the health of the whole person and use their hands to help diagnose and treat their patients.