Hives and Angioedema Treatment

Self-Care at Home

- Stop any food or medicine identified as the cause of the hives or angioedema.
- In very mild cases, no treatment at all may be required.
- If symptoms are making you uncomfortable, take a nonprescription antihistamine, such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) or loratadine (Claritin), by mouth, per the package instructions or as directed by your health care provider, until symptoms subside. These can be effective for mild episodes. CAUTION: Sedating antihistamines such as Benadryl may make you too drowsy to drive or operate machinery safely. Claritin is a nonsedating antihistamine.
- Cool compresses or baths may help with the discomfort.
- Avoid hot baths or showers.
- Avoid direct sunlight.
- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing.
- Avoid strenuous activity or anything that might cause sweating.
- Try to relax and reduce stress.

Severe reactions: Do not attempt to treat severe reactions or to wait it out at home. Go immediately to the nearest emergency department or call an ambulance. Here are some things you can do while waiting for the ambulance:

- Try to stay calm.
- If you can identify the cause of the reaction, prevent further exposure.
- Take an antihistamine, such as 1-2 tablets or capsules of diphenhydramine (Benadryl), if you can swallow without difficulty. The liquid form of diphenhydramine (Benadryl) can also be used at 2-4 teaspoons (10-20 mL) per dose.
- If you are wheezing or having difficulty breathing, use an inhaled bronchodilator, such as albuterol (Proventil), if one is available. These inhaled medications dilate the airway.
- If you are feeling light-headed or faint, lie down and raise your legs higher than your head to help blood flow to your brain.
If you have been given an epinephrine kit for allergic reactions, inject yourself as you have been instructed. The kit provides a premeasured dose of epinephrine, a prescription drug that rapidly reverses the most serious symptoms (see Follow-up).

- Bystanders should administer CPR to a person who becomes unconscious and stops breathing or does not have a pulse.
- If at all possible, you or your companion should be prepared to tell medical personnel what medications you take and your allergy history.

**Medical Treatment**

The treatment of hives depends on the severity of the symptoms. For mild to moderately severe localized symptoms, a nonprescription antihistamine by mouth is usually adequate, along with skin care measures for comfort. For more severe cases, an injection or short course of a corticosteroid may be needed to rapidly reduce swelling and itching. Hospitalization may be necessary in severe cases.

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- When to Seek Medical Care
- Exams and Tests
- Next Steps
- Prevention
- Outlook


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