



Hives (Urticaria)

Hives are itchy, red welts or small bumps that last from 15 minutes to several hours. They usually appear suddenly and leave no trace when they disappear. Crops of hives may appear several times a day. They may come and go for days or weeks, sometimes longer. Hives are certainly annoying, but are otherwise harmless unless they cause throat swelling; this is rare but requires immediate treatment.

WHAT CAUSES HIVES?

Hives may be caused by something taken internally, most often a medicine such as penicillin or aspirin. Sometimes foods cause hives; shellfish and strawberries are well known examples. Hives in children are often caused by infections such as a virus or strep throat but are rarely the sign of more serious internal disease. Occasionally, physical agents such as pressure or cold can cause hives. Fortunately, we can usually treat hives successfully--even though their cause may remain a mystery.

TREATMENT:

In treating hives, we try to find a cause. It may be helpful to keep a record of foods or other ingested items (for example, vitamins and medicines).

Hives are usually controlled by antihistamines. Antihistamines often cause drowsiness and may only be tolerated at nighttime. Occasionally, antihistamines may make a child hyperactive. Injections of epinephrine (adrenaline) may be used for treatment of severe hives. Sometimes, epinephrine-like medicines taken by mouth are used in combination with antihistamines. Hives usually improve within days after medication is begun.

This is the medical opinion of Savannah River Dermatology. For additional information, please contact us at 706-691-7079.