

## What are hives?

Hives or welts (also known as urticaria) appear as red, itchy, swollen areas of the skin. They range in size and can show up anywhere on the body. They can appear without warning and at any age. Hives typically fade within 24 hours without any lasting marks or bruises.

Hives can be triggered by

- allergic reactions to medications
- allergic reactions to certain foods
- allergic reactions to other allergens
- viruses
- extreme heat or cold
- exposure to sun or water
- physical exercise

## What if my hives last longer than 24 hours?

Some people have chronic hives that appear almost daily for months or years. If your hives have lasted more than 6 weeks, your provider will likely consider them **chronic hives**. Chronic hives can be caused by autoimmune conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, or thyroid disease. They can also be spontaneous.

Oral antihistamines often resolve chronic hives. If the chronic hives are more severe, your provider may recommend other medications.



Talk to your doctor if your hives have lasted more than 6 weeks and/or have not resolved with antihistamines.

## Are all chronic hives the same?

There are two kinds of chronic hives or chronic urticaria. Neither is dangerous and both can be treated.

**Chronic inducible urticaria** is caused by something in the environment. It can occur at any age and may last from 15 minutes to 3 hours. Antihistamines should ease this condition. Environmental triggers may include

- scratching or rubbing against the skin
- pressure on the skin from tight clothing
- sweating or hot temperatures
- exposure to cold or ice
- swelling from vibration
- exposure to sunlight
- exposure to water



### Did You Know?

Hives often occur without an obvious trigger, anywhere on the body, at any age.

## How can I get relief from hives?

The main goal of any treatment for hives is to relieve the itching, redness, and any swelling. **Antihistamines** are the best first step to resolving hives. Your provider may recommend a combination of antihistamines or a higher dose of a single antihistamine.

Older antihistamines such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl®) can make you sleepy or feel dried out. They typically only last several hours. Newer antihistamines are less likely to make you sleepy and have fewer side effects. These are often the first medication your provider will recommend to resolve hives.

Common non-drowsy antihistamines include

- cetirizine (Zyrtec®)
- loratadine (Claritin®)
- levocetirizine (Xyzal®)
- desloratadine (Clarinex®)
- fexofenadine (Allegra®)



## What if I notice swelling without hives?

Many different conditions can cause swelling below the skin and fatty tissue (also called angioedema). It is important to see a healthcare provider to determine the cause of the swelling and the right treatment.

Swelling that occurs with hives will generally resolve with antihistamines or other treatment for the hives.



### When to Get Help

Swelling in the throat can be life-threatening. **If you feel your throat swelling suddenly, you need immediate medical attention. Go directly to the nearest emergency room or call 911.**



Talk to your doctor if swelling occurs without hives. You may need additional evaluation to determine the cause.

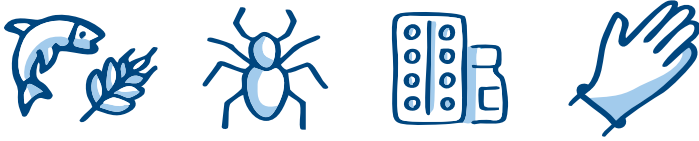
Swelling without hives may be caused by

- Aspiring or NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, etc.)
- Certain blood pressure medications (ACE inhibitors) – typically those with names that end in “-pril”, such as lisinopril. This can happen even if you have taken the medication for a long time without swelling.
- Hereditary angioedema (HAE) or acquired angioedema – your doctor can determine if these are the cause.

## When are hives and swelling from an allergy dangerous?

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that often involves hives, swelling, and a drop in blood pressure. In severe cases it can include shock. **If anaphylactic shock isn't treated immediately, it can be deadly.**

Anaphylaxis involves more than one system in the body. Symptoms usually start within 5 to 30 minutes of contact with the substance the person is allergic to. It can take as long as an hour to notice symptoms.



Anaphylaxis can be caused by food allergies, insect stings, medication allergies, or latex allergy.



## When to Get Help

**If you or someone near you shows more than one of these warning signs, seek immediate medical attention. Call 911 or go directly to the nearest emergency room.**

- red rash – usually itchy and possibly with welts or hives
- swollen throat or other areas of the body
- wheezing
- passing out, fainting
- chest tightness
- trouble breathing
- hoarse voice
- trouble swallowing
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- stomach cramps
- pale or red color of the face or body



## Learn more from these trusted sources

Your Ochsner allergy team recommends the following websites to learn more about allergies and hives. Scan these codes with your phone's camera or visit the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology at [aaaai.org/tools-for-the-public](https://www.aaaai.org/tools-for-the-public) or the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology at [acaai.org](https://www.acaai.org).

- Check pollen counts
- Glossary and drug guide
- Interactive tools
- Online symptom test
- Videos
- Support and resources
- Tips for managing allergies
- Vaccine information
- Latest research and articles



[aaaai.org](https://www.aaaai.org)



[acaai.org](https://www.acaai.org)



1-866-OCHSNER | [ochsner.org](https://ochsner.org)