



## ABOUT ALLERGY

take control of your allergy

### URTICARIA AND ANGIOEDEMA (HIVES AND SWELLINGS)

Hives are itchy, red, raised rash lasting less than 24 hours and disappears without leaving any mark. The size of hives can be from 1 millimetre to centimetres. Hives occur anywhere on the body. Hives affects patients both children and adults and the peak onset for adults is between 20-40 years. Acute urticaria is hives that are of less than 6 weeks duration and chronic urticaria is hives that have been continuously or intermittent for more than 6 weeks.

#### Urticaria



#### Angioedema



Angioedema is defined as swelling in the deeper layers of the skin usually taking longer than 24 hours to disappear and may be painful.

Causes can be due to allergy cells that release histamine after a physical trigger (see examples below), viral infections, reaction to foods or preservatives, the immune system attacking itself or medication e.g. aspirin, voltaren, brufen, ponsten.

Physical urticaria and/or angioedema	Example of triggers
Dermatographism	Minor forms of pressure on the skin- pressure from clothes, minor trauma
Cold induced	Contact water of any temperature (cold or hot)
Solar	Exposure to sun
Cholinergic	Exercise, sweating, emotional factors, and hot baths or showers
Aquagenic	Activities in cold water or cold weather
Delayed pressure	Tight clothes, sitting on bench, holding heavy bags
Vibratory	After using vibratory equipments

Investigations depend on the cause.

## Treatment

Avoidance of drugs that may worsen the condition, stress, alcohol or physical triggers. Food avoidance of preservatives, colourants or natural salicylate is usually recommended for 3 weeks if symptoms are associated with ingestion. Food avoidance is advised for specific patients only. Antihistamines are used for chronic urticaria sometimes given up to four times the normal dose. Cooling lotions such as calamine lotion or mentol in cetamecragol creams may be helpful to relieve itch.

### Angioedema/ Swelling without hives

There are different causes to swelling, not all swellings are because of histamine (a chemical released by allergy cells). Causes can be due to:

- **Hereditary angioedema**, a life-threatening condition that often runs in the family and occurs because of a lack of protein (C1 inhibitor) in the body. The swelling is commonly seen on the arms, legs, face, stomach (causing stomach pain and vomiting), and airway.
- **Acquired C1 inhibitor deficiency**, a condition seen in patients over 40 years of age due to underlying autoimmune or malignancy. It is not passed on from family.
- **ACE Inhibitors** (e.g. enalapril, perindopril) used in high blood pressure. This can happen after many years of using this medication.
- **Non-steroidal inflammatory drugs** (e.g. aspirin, ponsten, voltaren, brufen)

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