

Urticaria

Definition

Raised red welts of various size on the surface of the skin which are often itchy.

Urticaria is associated with an allergic reaction and histamine release or abnormalities in the complement system or the kinin system.

Causes, Incidence, and Risk Factors

- About 1 out of 5 people experience hives at some time.
- Most commonly seen in the “allergic type”.
- The welts occur on the surface of the skin, usually in batches.
- Release of histamine and other chemicals into the bloodstream, associated with the allergic response, causes the itching, localized swelling, and other symptoms.

Common triggers include:

- medications
- foods (such as berries, shellfish, fish, nuts, eggs, milk, and others)
- pollen
- animal dandruff (especially cats)
- insect bites
- exposure to water, sunlight, cold or heat
- emotional stress
- Hives may also develop after infections or illness.
- There seems to be a hereditary tendency toward the development of hives.

Some nonallergic causes of hives include:

- dermatographism
- cold urticaria
- lupus erythematosus (SLE)
- echinococcus infection (dog tapeworm)
- hereditary angioedema
- Henoch-Schonlein purpura
- mononucleosis
- hepatitis
- mastocytosis

Dermagraphia



Prevention

Avoid exposure
to known allergens.

Symptoms

- itching (pruritus)
- swelling of the surface of the skin into red or skin coloured welts (wheals) with clearly defined edges
 - sudden onset
 - rapid resolution
 - welts blanch to touch
 - new welts develop when the skin is scratched
- welts enlarge, spread or join together to form large flat raised areas
- welts change shape, disappear and reappear within minutes or hours

Signs and Tests

- The diagnosis is primarily based on the appearance of the skin, and is confirmed by a history of exposure to an irritant or allergen.
- Occasionally, skin tests for allergy may be performed.

Treatment

- Hives in the throat may obstruct the airway, so any swelling in the throat or difficulty breathing with hives are emergency symptoms.
- Treatment may not be needed if hives are mild, and they may disappear spontaneously.
- Antihistamines, cold compresses may reduce the inflammation, itching, and swelling.
- Avoid known allergens to prevent recurrence of hives.

Prognosis

Hives may be uncomfortable, but they generally are harmless and disappear on their own.

Complications

- Airways obstruction due to swelling if hives occur in throat.
- Anaphylaxis









