

Skin tests may be performed to determine the substance that you are allergic to. Routine blood tests are done to determine if a systemic illness is present.

Treatment for Urticaria and Angioedema

- The best treatment for hives and angioedema is to identify and remove the trigger, but this is often a hard task.
- Antihistamines block the effect of histamine, and can reduce itching and rash in most cases. Antihistamines may be needed for as long as the urticaria persists. Reports of serious side effects of antihistamines are very rare.
- A low histamine diet can help to reduce exogenous histamine derived from foods, which helps in some cases. To find out more about a low histamine diet, please contact our dietitian.
- Oral corticosteroids may be prescribed.
- For a severe hives or angioedema outbreak, an injection of adrenaline or a steroid medication may be needed.
- Other immunosuppressant such as cyclosporin may be beneficial in severe cases for long term control.

Tips to Manage Urticaria and Angioedema

- Avoid hot water; use lukewarm water
- Use gentle, mild soap
- Apply cool compresses or wet cloths to the affected areas
- Try to work and sleep in a cool room
- Wear loose-fitting lightweight clothes
- Avoid foods that are fermented or high in colorings and preservatives
- Keep a food diary to identify any specific food triggers

For enquiries and appointments, please contact us at:

Allergy Centre

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Service Hours

Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri : 9:00 am – 6:00 pm

Wed & Sat : 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

(except in the second and fourth week of each month, the Centre will close all day Wednesdays but open all day Saturdays)

Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays

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過敏病科中心
Allergy Centre

Urticaria and Angioedema



養和醫院
Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital

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Urticaria and Angioedema

Urticaria, also known as hives, is a sudden outbreak of swollen, pale red bumps, or patches that look like mosquito bites. Urticaria can cause itching, burning or stinging. Hives vary in size, and can appear anywhere on the body, including face, lips, tongue, throat, or ears. They may join together to form larger areas known as plaques. They can last for hours, or up to several days before fading.

Angioedema is a deeper form of urticaria that occurs beneath the skin instead of on the surface. Angioedema is characterised by deep swelling around the eyes and lips and sometimes of the genitals, hands and feet. It can also involve the gut giving rise to tummy pains. It generally lasts longer than hives, but the swelling usually goes away in less than 24 hours.

Occasionally, severe, prolonged tissue swelling can be disfiguring. In rare cases, angioedema of the throat, tongue, or lungs can block the airways, causing breathing difficulty. This may become life-threatening.



Urticaria



Angioedema

What Causes Urticaria and Angioedema?

Both urticaria and angioedema are caused by the release of histamine and other chemicals from the mast cells in the skin. There are many triggers for urticaria and angioedema, and different tests are available for finding the causes. However, the exact cause is often unknown.

Common Triggers:

- Allergic reactions to foods, drugs or animals
- Chemicals in foods
- Insect stings
- Pressure on skin
- Sunlight exposure
- Exercise

Types of Urticaria and Angioedema

Acute urticaria and/or angioedema

Hives or swelling lasting less than six weeks. The most common causes are foods, medicines, latex, or infections. Insect bites and internal disease may also be responsible. The most common foods that cause hives are shellfish, nuts, chocolate, fish, tomatoes, eggs, fresh berries, soy, wheat, milk, food additives and preservatives. Medicines that can cause hives and angioedema include aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen), high blood pressure medications (ACE inhibitors), or painkillers such as codeine.

Chronic urticaria and/or angioedema

Hives or swelling lasting more than six weeks. The cause of this type of hives is usually more difficult to identify than those causing acute urticaria and/or angioedema. The causes can be similar to those of acute urticaria but can also include autoimmunity, chronic infections, hormonal disorders, and malignancy.

Cholinergic urticaria

Hives occur when sweating, and can be triggered during exercise, by heat, emotional stress or eating spicy foods. Small itchy bumps with variable redness appear within minutes, and usually last for less than one hour.

Dermatographism

Also called “skin writing”, itchy weals occur after firmly stroking or scratching the skin. This urticaria is generally very itchy especially when hot and last for less than an hour.

Solar urticaria

Hives caused by exposure to sunlight, result in redness and itch, usually last for less than one hour.

Cold urticaria

Itchy hives caused by cold temperature including rain, wind or cold water. Swimming in cold water may cause severe hives and possibly fainting, therefore must be avoided.

Aquagenic urticaria

Hives caused by exposure to water of any temperature, usually on the upper part of the body, usually last for less than one hour.

Contact urticaria

Hives caused in minutes by contacts with chemicals, foods, plants, animals or animal products. Some common causes are citrus, eggs, latex, cats and dogs, usually last for less than one hour.

Angioedema without weals

Angioedema caused by medications (aspirin, ACE inhibitors) or food allergies, or a part of chronic urticaria / angioedema.

Hereditary angioedema

This is painful swelling of tissue of face, mouth, throat or gut, caused by an inherited deficiency of a blood protein. It is passed on through families.

Diagnosis of Urticaria and Angioedema

Your doctor will need to ask many questions in an attempt to find the possible cause of urticaria or angioedema. Since there are no specific tests for hives, or the associated swelling of angioedema, testing will depend on your medical history and a thorough examination by your primary care doctor, allergist, immunologist, or dermatologist.