
Itchy or Painful Insect Bites

Bites of mosquitoes, chiggers (harvest mites), fleas, and bedbugs usually cause itchy, red bumps. A mosquito bite itches, has a central raised dot in the swelling, usually is on an uncovered part of the skin, and happens in summertime.

Fleas and bedbugs don't fly. They crawl under clothing to nibble. Bites of horseflies, deerflies, gnats, fire ants, harvester ants, blister beetles, and centipedes usually cause a painful, red bump.

Home Care

1. Itchy insect bites. Apply calamine lotion or a baking soda and water solution to the area of the bite. If it is very itchy (as with chiggers), apply nonprescription 1% hydrocortisone cream. Another way to reduce the itch is to apply firm, direct, steady pressure to the bite for 10 seconds. A fingernail or pen cap can be used.

2. Painful insect bites. Rub the area of the bite with a cotton ball soaked in meat-tenderizer and water for 20 minutes. This will relieve the pain. (Don't use meat tenderizer near the eye.) If you don't have any meat tenderizer, use baking soda and water. Give acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain relief.

Prevention of Mosquito and Chigger Bites

Apply a little insect repellent to clothing or exposed skin before your child goes outdoors. Citronella oil and Skin-so-Soft are fairly effective insect repellents and are safe. The most effective insect repellent is "DEET" but it is toxic. If you use a repellent with DEET, make sure it has no more than 10% DEET

- To prevent contact with the mouth or eyes, don't put any repellent on the hands.
- Don't put repellent on sunburned areas or rashes.
- Teach children that 3 or 4 drops can protect the whole body.
- Wash off the repellent after your child comes indoors.

Call us immediately if:

- A bite looks infected (red streaks, increased tenderness).

Call us during office hours if:

- Itching or pain is severe after treatment.
- You have other questions or concerns.

Source: Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.