



University of North Carolina Wilmington
Abrons Student Health Center

INSTRUCTION SHEET: BEE STING, LOCAL REACTION

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed a mild allergic reaction to a bee/wasp sting. Fortunately, most bee stings are not serious and cause only temporary swelling, redness, and pain at the sting site. Rarely, a whole-body allergic reaction occurs; shock can result.

The stinger, if still in the wound, should be removed; if the stinger is left in place, bee toxin continues to enter the body, increasing the reaction. A stinger should be removed with a piece of paper or credit card, using a sideways scraping motion. A pair of tweezers can also be used to remove the stinger, but try not to squeeze the stinger, or more toxin can be pushed inside the wound.

Realize that swelling may increase at first, even with treatment. Measures can be taken, however, to minimize the reaction to bee stings.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR BEE STING:

1. Rest and elevate the affected body part. Rest and elevation help reduce swelling and pain.
2. Apply cold packs to the area off-and-on for the first 24 hours after injury. Cold helps ease discomfort, and minimizes additional swelling. Do not apply ice directly to the area, causing discomfort. Rather, aim for coolness, yet comfort, applying a layer or two of cloth between the cold pack and affected area.
3. Take over-the-counter antihistamines: In the morning, take a non-sedating antihistamine such as loratadine, 10 mg daily. At night, take diphenhydramine (Benadryl), 25 mg, 1 or 2 every 6 hours for itching and swelling. The main side effect of diphenhydramine is drowsiness, so do not drive, operate machinery, climb a ladder, etc., while taking the medicine. Stop taking the antihistamines when the itching and swelling are gone.
4. Over-the-counter medications can help relieve discomfort associated with bee stings. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on personal preference.
5. Should symptoms of a serious, whole-body allergic reaction occur (chances are small), proceed *immediately* to the closest emergency department. Specifically, seek attention if you develop: whole-body rash and itching, difficulty breathing (wheezing, noise on breathing in), or become shocky (pale, sweaty, faint, lightheaded, confused).
6. Should you later develop signs of infection at the sting site, return promptly to the Student Health Center or see another provider. Signs of infection include: pus draining from the bite site, increasing redness/swelling/ warmth around the wound, or red streaks spreading from the wound.