

## The Buzz about Bee Stings

Experienced hikers have seen this before - but this timely reminder comes as the bees are out and very busy! Typically, bee stings are merely a common seasonal nuisance that can be effectively treated at home. However, it's important to keep in mind that if you're allergic to bee stings or get stung multiple times, you may develop a more serious reaction requiring emergency treatment.

Safety first! All hikers need to get out of harm's way if a hive is disturbed! Bees release a scent when in danger, which attracts other bees. Cover your nose and mouth and slowly walk away from imminent danger before their reinforcements arrive.

If you or a hiking companion is stung, you need to:

- Determine if the stinger is present. Look for a small black dot at the sting site and remove it immediately. It's best to scrape or brush it off using a blunt knife, credit card, or your thumbnail. If a bee's venom sack is left inside the victim, it can take 2 to 3 minutes to release all the venom, so prompt removal is essential.
- Bear in mind that the stingers of wasps, hornets, and yellow jackets are not barbed and are retracted upon stinging, but these insects can sting you multiple times.
- Try to reduce the body's inflammatory process by applying cold, such as ice from your water bottle or a cold pack if available.
- Remove rings if stung on the hands or fingers.
- Cleanse the area with soap and water as soon as possible.
- Apply calamine lotion, hydrocortisone cream, or Benadryl gel to ease redness, itching, or swelling.
- Understand that some parts of the body are more sensitive to stings and respond differently. Bites near the eyes, lips, tip of the nose, or ears are particularly prone to swelling.
- Remember that taking an antihistamine such as Benadryl or Chlor-Trimeton will slow down an allergic reaction but won't prevent it.
- Stay calm and keep in mind that localized pain, redness, swelling, warmth, and itching are common local reactions

If you or your hiking companion is among the 2% to 3% of Americans who go on to develop an anaphylactic reaction to an insect sting, know when to call 911:

- Difficulty breathing
- Hives that are red and spread beyond the bite
- Swelling of face, throat, or mouth
- Wheezing, inability to swallow
- Restless, anxiety, dizziness
- Any time a hiker is stung more than 12 times.

If you have had serious allergic reactions or anaphylaxis in the past, please talk to your doctor about strategies to keep you safe on the trail. Remember to bring your medication (EpiPen) with you on all hikes, and notify a fellow hiker of proper use.

By Karen Pressman