



Student Health Center

UNC Wilmington

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 at home.
- 2- Elevate the affected body part. Elevation helps reduce swelling and pain.
- 3- 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 towel between the cold pack and affected area.
- 4- Continue diphenhydramine (Benadryl), 25 mg, 1 or 2 every 4 to 6 hours to help minimize the reaction; this medicine is available over-the-counter. Titrate the diphenhydramine to control your symptoms: Take 25 or 50 mg, 4 to 6 times a day, depending on how much itching and swelling you have. A common side effect of Benadryl is drowsiness, so do not drive, operate machinery, climb a ladder, etc., while taking the medicine. Stop taking the Benadryl when your itching and swelling are decreasing.
- 5- Over-the-counter medications can help relieve discomfort associated with bee stings. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on personal preference.
- 6- 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, sweating, fainting, lightheaded, confused).
- 7- Should you later develop signs of infection at the sting site, return promptly to the Student Health Center. Signs of infection include: pus draining from the bite site, increasing redness/swelling/ warmth around the wound, or red streaks spreading from the wound.