



Ouch, What was That!



Whether you're in the water, at school, or in your backyard, wildlife you encounter have ways of protecting themselves and their territory.

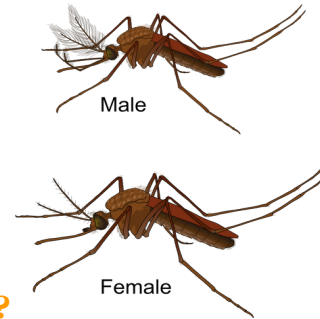
Insects, such as bees, ants, fleas, flies, mosquitoes, wasps, and arachnids, may bite or sting if you get close. Most won't bother you if you don't bother them, but knowing what to look for is key.

The initial contact of a bite may be painful. It's often followed by an allergic reaction to venom deposited into your skin through the insect's mouth or stinger.

Most bites and stings trigger nothing more than minor discomfort, but some encounters can be deadly, especially if you have severe allergies to the insect venom.

Prevention is the best medicine, so knowing how to recognize and avoid biting and stinging animals or insects is the best way to stay safe.

The season also matters. For example, mosquitoes, stinging bees, and wasps tend to come out in full force during the summer.



What causes reactions to bites and stings?

The venom injected into your body from the bite or sting of an insect will cause your immune system to respond. Often, your body's immediate response will include redness and swelling at the site of the bite or sting.

Minor delayed reactions include itching and soreness.

If you're very sensitive to an insect's venom, bites and stings can cause a potentially fatal condition called [anaphylactic shock](#). This can cause the throat to tighten and make breathing difficult or cause low blood pressure. Some bites and stings may cause illnesses when venom contains infectious agents.

Who is at risk for bites and stings?

Anyone can be bitten or stung by an insect, and bites and stings are very common. You're at greater risk if you spend a lot of time outdoors, especially in rural or wooded locations. Children and older adults may have more severe reactions to bites and stings.

What are the symptoms of a bad reaction to bites and stings?

If you're bitten or stung, you may see or feel the insect on your skin during the attack. Some people don't notice the insect and may not be aware of a bite or sting until one or more of the following symptoms emerge:

- swelling
- redness or rash
- pain in the affected area or in the muscles
- itching
- heat on and around the site of the bite or sting
- numbness or tingling in the affected area

Symptoms of a severe reaction requiring immediate medical treatment include:

- fever
- difficulty breathing
- nausea or vomiting
- muscle spasms
- rapid heartbeat
- swelling of the lips and throat
- confusion
- loss of consciousness

If you feel ill or experience flu-like symptoms in the days following an insect bite, see your doctor for tests to rule out infections or diseases you may have contracted from the insect.

Treating bites and stings

The majority of bites and stings can be treated at home, especially if your reaction is mild. To treat a bite or sting:

- Remove the stinger if it's lodged in your skin.
- Wash the affected area.
- Apply an [ice pack](#) to reduce pain and swelling.

[Topical anti-itch creams](#), [oral pain relievers](#), and [antihistamines](#) may be used to combat uncomfortable symptoms. Call 911 or your local emergency services number immediately if symptoms of a severe reaction are present.

First aid instructions while waiting for paramedics to arrive include:

- loosening the victim's clothing
- laying them on their side
- [performing CPR](#) if breathing or heartbeat stops

If you believe a spider of the black widow or brown recluse variety has bitten you, seek emergency medical treatment immediately even if symptoms seem minor or haven't emerged. Scorpion bites also should be treated in the emergency room, regardless of symptoms.

What's the long-term outlook?

Most bites and stings heal by themselves after several days of mild discomfort. Monitor the affected site for signs of infection. Contact your doctor if the wound appears to be getting worse or hasn't healed after several weeks.

<https://www.healthline.com/health/bug-bites#causes>