

Urticaria (Hives)



What is urticaria?

Urticaria, commonly called hives, are itchy rashes characterised by localised redness and swelling of the skin. These rashes may resemble mosquito bites and last for 24 to 48 hours before subsiding. They may be pinpoint but can vary in size. Urticaria is common and up to 20% of people will develop an episode during their lifetime.



Examples of Urticaria

When these rashes develop around loose tissues such as the eyes or lips, the affected area may swell excessively. This reaction is called angioedema.



Examples of Angioedema

What are the types and causes of urticaria?

- **Acute Urticaria**

Acute urticaria is the most frequent type of urticaria seen in children and each episode lasts for less than 6 weeks. The most common cause is infection, either viral or bacterial. Other causes include stress, drugs (painkillers or antibiotics), food (peanuts, eggs, milk or shellfish etc.), contact (animals, insects or plants) and physical agents (cold, pressure, sweat or sunlight).

- **Chronic Urticaria**

Chronic urticaria tends to occur daily and lasts for more than 6 weeks. It can occur in both children and adults. The cause cannot be identified in majority of the cases. Sometimes it may be an autoimmune problem where the body's immune system is reacting against itself. Chronic urticaria usually resolves over time, in 6 months for most cases, and requires symptomatic treatment such as antihistamines.



How is urticaria treated?

- **Acute Urticaria**

Acute urticaria is short-lived and thus no treatment is usually needed as it tends to subside within 24 hours. However, treatment with antihistamines is recommended if the itch or discomfort is significant. If the trigger is known, it should be avoided.

- **Chronic Urticaria**

Medications are often needed. The patient should also avoid aggravating factors such as heat, alcohol, some medications (cough mixtures or aspirin), physical agent (cold, pressure, sweat or sunlight) and stress. However, some patients will require further blood tests and long-term antihistamines.

What are the medications used for urticaria?

Non-sedating antihistamines are 'first-line' medicines and can decrease the number of urticarial lesions, the frequency of flare-ups and diminish itchiness. Sedating antihistamines can also be used. However, they can cause sleepiness and loss of alertness. Despite this, they are useful at bedtime especially when combined with a non-sedating antihistamine during the day.

H2 block antihistamines can be used as an add-on therapy. They are effective if combined with H1 antihistamines in treating patients with uncontrolled or severe chronic urticaria.

Prednisolone (steroids) may be given as a short course in uncontrolled cases only.

Your doctor may occasionally prescribe other immunomodulatory medicines such as cyclosporine, methotrexate or omalizumab.



When should you consult a doctor about your urticaria?

- If it is painful, lasts more than 48 hours or does not fade
- If it is associated with swelling of the throat or difficulty in breathing
- If there is a loss of consciousness
- If you suspect a specific trigger and want to perform tests to confirm it
- If it is recurrent, often occurring over a few months
- If it is chronic, lasting for more than 6 weeks

Do I need to do any tests for chronic urticaria?

Tests are usually not required. However, if you suspect a specific trigger or you have chronic urticaria which does not respond to treatment, specific tests may be required. Your doctor will decide if any tests are needed.



About the Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI)

The KTP-NUCMI is the paediatric arm of the National University Hospital and comprises the Departments of Paediatrics, Paediatric Surgery and Neonatology. We provide comprehensive and specialised medical and surgical services for newborns, children and adolescents, and are the only public hospital in Singapore that offers paediatric kidney and liver transplant programmes. Through a generous gift from the Estate of Khoo Teck Puat, we have set up an integrated outpatient facility with medical, diagnostic and rehabilitation services.

For more information about us, visit www.nuh.com.sg/nuhkids.

Contact Us

24-hour Children’s Emergency

Location: NUH Main Building, Zone F, Level 1
General Enquiry: +65 6772 2555

KTP-NUCMI

Location: NUH Main Building, Zone E, Level 2 (Accessible via Kent Ridge Wing, Zone C, Level 2, Lift Lobby C)
Operating Hours: 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri), 8.30am – 12.30pm (Sat)
General Enquiry: +65 6772 5736 Appointment Line: +65 6772 2002
Fax: +65 6776 2102 Email: ktpnucmi_appt@nuhs.edu.sg

9a Viva-University Children’s Cancer Centre

Location: NUH Medical Centre, Zone B, Level 9
Operating Hours: 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri) Appointment Line: +65 6772 5030
Fax: +65 6872 4314 Email: cbccappt@nuhs.edu.sg

NUH Children’s Urgent Care Clinic @ Bukit Panjang

Location: Junction 10, 1 Woodlands Road, #01-22, Singapore 677899
Operating Hours: 9am – 11pm daily (including public holidays)
General Enquiry: +65 6219 1538 Email: childreucc@nuhs.edu.sg
Website: www.nuh.com.sg/ucc

NUH Child Development Unit @ JMC

Location: Jurong Medical Centre, 60 Jurong West Central 3, Level 2, Singapore 648346
Operating Hours: 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri) Appointment Line: +65 6665 2530/2531
Fax: +65 6665 0158 Email: cdu@nuhs.edu.sg
Website: www.nuh.com.sg/cdu

NUH Child Development Unit @ Keat Hong

Location: Keat Hong Community Club, 2 Choa Chu Kang Loop, #03-01, Singapore 689687
Operating Hours: 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri) Appointment Line: +65 6769 4537/4637
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National University Hospital

Location: 5 Lower Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 119074
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