



A patient information flyer developed by the Asian Society of Pediatric Dermatology on

# URTICARIA AND ANGIOEDEMA

## Hives

Hives or urticaria appear on the skin as wheals that are red, itchy and swollen. They can vary in size and may appear anywhere on the body, limbs and/ or face. Hives occur at all ages.



Fig. 1. Wheals may be round, form rings, a map-like pattern or giant patches

## Causes

Hives are a common reaction. Sometimes, your body releases histamine and other chemicals into your bloodstream. This may cause itchiness, swelling and other symptoms.

Hives fall into two categories: acute and chronic.

Acute hives can be caused by infection (especially viral), drugs, food or latex allergy. Other possible causes are plants, animals and chemical contacts. These hives usually go away spontaneously within six weeks.

Chronic hives are hives that recur or persist continuously beyond six weeks, sometimes daily for months to years. These are not triggered by allergens. In these individuals, physical triggers like scratching, pressure, cold, heat, physical exercise, direct sunlight or stress may aggravate their hives.

## Angioedema

Angioedema is swelling that occurs in the deeper layers of the skin. The swelling most often occurs around the eyelids, mouth or genitals. Hives and angioedema may appear together or separately on the body.

## Management of hives

- Eliminate identifiable triggers. Sometimes, no cause can be detected.
- Oral antihistamines. Higher doses for a prolonged course are often necessary for chronic hives.
- Omalizumab. This is an injectable medication that can be used to treat antihistamine-resistant chronic idiopathic urticaria in patients 12 years of age and older.

Majority of patients with chronic hives will improve in the first year and most will clear in five years.

Investigations are seldom necessary but if performed, results are usually normal in children.

A very small number may experience these hives for more than 20 years. About half will have one more episode of chronic hives in their lifetime.

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