

Treatment of Bee Stings

By Nola McGann

I have been bitten by bees a few times in my life. I am not allergic and had small local skin reactions due to taking out the stinger. A couple of months ago I was cutting the grass near our beehive with a brush cutter. I was fully covered from neck to toe, long sleeves and overalls. The only thing uncovered was my head and face. My fringe was messy and the noise must have disturbed the guard bees. Well, needless to say, I was a target and 2 or 3 bees got stuck in my fringe panicked and stung me a few times! I couldn't get them out so I of course screamed for Barry to assist with removing the bees and stings! It was not an easy task! So to this day I still have a soft swelling on my forehead under my fringe that was not there before I was stung! So I decided you might like to know some current information on bee stings and treatment! Below is some of the information that I found.

The honey bee is the most common cause of allergic reactions to insects in Australia. Allergies to venoms from stinging insects (bees wasps and ants) are the most common causes of severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) in Australia.

Symptoms include an all over rash, swelling of the tongue or throat, trouble breathing, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, vomiting and a drop in blood pressure. (ASCIA- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy).

When a honey bee stings a person, it usually cannot pull the barbed stinger back out. It leaves behind not only the stinger, but part of its abdomen and digestive tract, plus muscles and nerves. This massive abdominal rupture kills the honey bee. The honey bees are the only bees to die after stinging. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/bee>)

Does killing a bee attract more?

Release of alarm pheromones near a hive or swarm attract other bees to the location, where they will likewise exhibit defensive behaviours until there is no longer a threat. (Typically because the victim has either fled or been killed.) (<https://www.sciencedaily.com>)

Why does a bee sting?

Bees sting, both because they are confused, stepped on or threatened and it is their only defence to get you away. (www.childrensmuseum.org)

Prevention

Honey bees normally only sting in self-defence. The best protection is light coloured clothing, covering most of the body, including wearing shoes and avoiding perfumes.

Stings and bites often occur on bare feet, so people with allergies to bites or stings should always wear shoes when outdoors.

Avoid provoking bees and wasps

People with a history of anaphylaxis to an insect sting should be referred to a clinical immunology/allergy specialist.

Severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) can be fatal

Anaphylaxis from stinging insect allergy results in an average of three deaths per year in Australia. Older people and those with difficult breathing are at a greater risk and should be seen by a clinical immunology/allergy specialist to develop a strategy for subsequent stings. Allergen immunotherapy can reduce the severity of the allergy.

Effective emergency treatment for anaphylaxis is available

Patients at risk of anaphylaxis are advised to

- a) Have a ASCIA (Australasian society of clinical immunology and allergy) Action Plan for Anaphylaxis and adrenaline auto injector (eg: EpiPen) readily available to treat anaphylaxis.
- b) Wear medical identification jewellery, which increase the likelihood that adrenaline will be administered in an emergency.
- c) Avoid medication that may increase the severity of anaphylaxis or complicate its treatment. Beta blockers and ACE inhibitors fall into this group.(Ask your Doctor if you are on these)
- d) Seek medical assistance if stung or bitten.

First aid is adequate for the treatment of minor allergic reactions to bees

Bees usually leave their barbed sting on the sting and die. Flicking the sting out as soon as possible will reduce the venom injected. Use the edge of your fingernail, a car key or the corner of a credit card. If possible try not to squeeze the venom sac, as this may increase the amount of venom injected.

Cold packs and soothing creams often help for minor reactions. Oral antihistamines can be useful for treating itch. Very large and uncomfortable local reactions may need cortisone tablets to settle the swelling. (ASCIA article-Allergic reactions to bites and stings 2019)

There are many natural remedies, not are all proven. If you can inspect the sting site, remove the stinger and wash the site with soap and water or just water, it will help remove some or all of the venom. Ice or an ice pack will reduce pain and swelling. But do not put ice directly onto the skin, if it is in a cloth or bag it won't damage the skin.

Some essential oils can be of some benefit to some people, but some can cause allergic reactions also.

There are many information sites to look up current treatments.

Where to get help

In an emergency, call triple zero (000).

Victorian Poisons Information Centre Tel 13 11 26 – seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Emergency department of the nearest hospital.

NURSE-ON- CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24hrs, 7 Days).

Your doctor.

Your pharmacist.

Anaphylaxis Australia Tel. 1300 728 000.

I hope this is some useful information. And I will always wear my complete bee suit when I am trimming grass close to our bee hives!

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone when our isolation is over.

Stay safe & Bee kind.

Regards

Nola Mc Gann