



# Got an itch?

## A guide to after-bite symptoms & relief

Insects can be a nuisance, especially during the summer months. Insect bites may be painful, with an annoying itch.

Importantly, insect bites are susceptible to infection.

This short guide will look at the symptoms of insect bites, the science behind the dreaded itch and suitable after-bite relief treatments.



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# The symptoms of insect bites

## Mosquitoes, midges, gnats and fleas

Bites from this group of insects will usually cause a red, swollen lump to develop on the skin.

Mosquito, midge and gnat bites are very itchy, with some people known to develop fluid-filled blisters.



## Horseflies

Horsefly bites are extremely painful, and the bitten area of skin will usually be red and raised.



## Bed bugs

If you discover itchy red bumps in straight lines on the face, neck, hands or arms, this is most likely caused by a bed bug.

Their bite isn't usually painful - but the red bumps may last for several days.

If you haven't been bitten by a bed bug before, you may not show any symptoms at all!

## Ticks

A tick bite can cause a red, swollen lump to develop on the skin, or a rash that looks like a 'bullseye'.

It isn't easy to know if you've been bitten by a tick, as the bite isn't always painful. If you discover a tick attached to your skin, you must remove it immediately.

Ticks can transmit a serious infection called Lyme disease in the UK. So if you develop flu-like symptoms after a tick bite or a rash that looks like a bulls eye, contact your GP.



On occasion, an insect can cause a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

If you begin to experience breathing difficulties, dizziness or a swollen face, then seek immediate medical treatment.



# The science behind the itch

Mosquito bites are well-renowned for being very itchy, but what exactly causes the itch?

## Blame the histamines!

When the mosquito bites, it draws out blood while injecting some of its saliva.

The body recognises the mosquito's saliva, which contains an anticoagulant and proteins, as a foreign substance. This triggers a response from our immune system.

The immune system then produces a chemical compound called histamine, which sends a signal to the nerve-endings around the bite area. This then creates the dreaded itch!

## What about the swelling?

Yes, you guessed it! The swelling and inflammation commonly associated with a mosquito bite is also caused by histamine.

Histamine increases blood flow and white blood cell count around the bite area.

Your body's intention - to keep you safe - is good. But its overreaction gives you that all-too-familiar irritation after a bite.

### Did you know?



Sometimes if a person is bitten for the first time they won't have experience any response at all.

This is because their body hasn't formulated a response to the foreign invader.

Some people may never react to a bite, whilst others may become more tolerant to a mosquito's saliva over time.

For many, however, the reaction remains consistent.



# After-bite relief and treatment

The pain and itchiness of an insect bite can last a few days, but don't just suffer through it!

## Antihistamines can help!

Over-the-counter treatments such as antihistamines can help ease discomfort and swelling.

They are reported to act as an effective form of bite relief - stopping histamine from affecting your body's cells, by blocking receptor sites in your nerve endings.



**DO NOT scratch your insect bites!**

When you scratch, this causes the skin to become even more inflamed, and itchier.



Excessive scratching can also open the wound and make you more susceptible to infection.

## Simple steps for immediate bite relief:



Thoroughly wash the bite affected area with soap and water.



Apply a cold compress or an ice pack to swelling for 10 minutes.



Raise the affected area if possible, to help reduce the swelling.



Avoid traditional home remedies, such as vinegar, as they're not proven to help.

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