

DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Urticaria (Hives)

If you have urticaria, also known as hives, understanding what triggers them can help you to better control your symptoms. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Angioedema	A potentially life-threatening allergic reaction. Both hives and angioedema cause swelling in the superficial layer of the skin. Angioedema, however, also affects the deep layers of the skin and mucosal membranes. It is especially dangerous when it affects the lips, tongue, and throat. Depending on the severity of the reaction, it is possible to cause airway swelling that makes it difficult to breathe.
Antihistamine	A medication that prevents histamine from binding to your cells. When histamine binds to your cells as part of the allergic response, it causes them to swell and leak fluid. This can contribute to the formation of hives on the skin. Antihistamines help to decrease this reaction.
Dermatographism	A type of urticaria, also referred to as "skin writing." In this case, hives are formed wherever pressure is applied to the skin. A light scratch on the skin will cause a localized raised red welt over that area.
Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA)	A test that checks for IgE antibodies in the body. These antibodies are increased in people who have allergies. An ELISA is performed by mixing a sample of your blood with an antigen from a suspected allergen. If you are allergic to that antigen, you will have IgE antibodies in your blood that will bind to those antigens. This results in a positive test.
Skin Prick Test	An allergy test performed in your doctor's office. A small amount of an antigen is scratched into the skin with a needle and you are monitored for a local reaction. A test is positive for an allergy if you develop a small red bump over the injection site.
Wheal	A temporarily raised area on the skin that is often itchy and red. A wheal may develop in response to an allergy. In this case, it is referred to as a hive. A wheal can also form in response to local trauma or irritation, e.g., a small bump that forms after an insect bite or where a solution is injected under the skin.



Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage your urticaria.

About Symptoms

- How can I tell if a red raised patch on my skin is a hive and not a skin infection?
- How long do hives usually last?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- I had an episode of hives. Am I at risk of getting them again?
- What is the most likely cause of my hives?
- Are hives contagious?
- Are there underlying medical conditions that put me at greater risk for hives?
- What are the potential complications of chronic hives?

About Diagnosis

- What laboratory studies are needed to diagnose my condition?
- Is it possible that studies will not be able to identify what causes my hives?

About Treatment

- What medications are most effective in treating hives? In preventing them?
- How long should I expect to be on medication?

About Living With Urticaria

- Should I avoid hot showers and baths?
- Are there certain foods I should cut out of my diet?
- What other lifestyle changes do you recommend to decrease my chances for hives?
