Hives

Hives (*urticaria*) are itchy, red, swollen patches on the skin. They may change size, shape, and location quickly and repeatedly. Hives that occur deeper in the skin can cause swelling of the hands, feet, and face. Hives may be an allergic reaction to something you ate, touched, or put on your skin. Hives can also be a reaction to cold, heat, viral infections, medication, insect bites, or emotional stress. Often the cause is hard to find. Hives can come and go for several days to several weeks. Hives are not contagious.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS:

- If the cause of the hives is known, avoid exposure to that source.
- To relieve itching and rash:
  - Apply cold compresses to the skin or take cool water baths. Do not take hot baths or showers because the warmth will make the itching worse.
  - The best medicine for hives is an antihistamine. An antihistamine will not cure hives, but it will reduce their severity. You can use an antihistamine available over the counter, such as Benadryl®. This medicine may make you sleepy. You should not drive while using this medicine.
  - Take or give Benadryl® as directed by your pharmacist or caregiver.
- Other medications may be prescribed for itching. Use these as directed.
- You should wear loose fitting clothing, including undergarments, as skin irritations may make hives worse.
- Follow-up as directed by your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You still have considerable itching after taking the medication (prescribed or purchased over the counter).
- An oral temperature above 102º F (38.9º C) develops.
- Joint swelling or pain occurs.
- You are not improving or are getting worse.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You notice any swelling of the lips, tongue, face or neck.
- You have shortness of breath, difficulty breathing or swallowing, or tightness in the throat or chest.
- *Abdominal* (belly) pain develops.
- You are feeling very sick.
- Your hives continue to spread.

These may be the first signs of a life-threatening allergic reaction. THIS IS AN EMERGENCY. Call 911 for medical help.

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