Take the sting out of summer

Enjoy long summer days, hikes in the woods and evening picnics, and you’re likely to suffer the occasional bite or sting. Mosquitoes, wasps, ticks among other unsavory characters, thrive in the warm weather. Fortunately there is a lot you can do to prevent bites and stings, and plenty of ways to soothe the pain if you do become prey.

Follow these links for the buzz on how to recognize, prevent and treat the sting:

- **Mosquitoes**
- **Bees and wasps**
- **Recognize allergic reactions**
- **Remedies to soothe the sting**
- **Helpful resources**

**Mosquitoes**

Though they actually help to pollinate certain plants, mosquitoes, with their high-pitched whine and red, itchy bites, are generally a nuisance to us. Mosquitoes will show up wherever people are enjoying an outdoor meal, and also gather around pools of water like lakes, ponds or streams (they need water to lay their eggs). Though they can annoy you all day, mosquitoes prefer dawn and dusk when temperatures cool.

The very young, the elderly and persons with depressed immune systems are at most risk for acquiring disease from mosquito bites.

*Avoid a mosquito bite with these tips:*

- Throughout the year, drain all water-holding outdoor containers around the home to prevent mosquitoes from breeding. Inspect basements and crawl spaces for excess water as well and drain if necessary.
- When outdoors, wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and hat. Many outdoor stores sell hats that include mosquito netting.
- If possible, avoid unnecessary outdoor activities at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.

* A few words about mosquito repellants:*

- At Dermatology Associates, we recommend using mosquito repellents containing DEET, considered by the Centers for Disease Control to be the most effective repellant. Available in drug stores, Deet is a powerful and effective product, but should be considered a last resort. Begin by wearing protective clothing and modifying your behavior to avoid being bitten in the first place.

- Do not use Deet in products that combine the repellent with a sunscreen. Sunscreens often are applied repeatedly, but Deet is will last up to eight hours. Repeated application may increase the potential toxic effects.
- For use on only clothing, shoes, bed nets and camping gear. Products containing the highly repellent ingredient permethrin are recommended.

- More natural products include Avon Skin So Soft lotion, and oil of lemon eucalyptus.

- Apply any repellent only to exposed skin (never under clothing). Use sparingly around the ears. Never use repellents over cuts, wounds or irritated skin.

- When applying on children, spray repellent on your hands first.

- Heavy saturation is not necessary.

- Always wash treated skin with soap and water, particularly when repellents have been used throughout the day. Wash treated clothing as well.

**Bees and Wasps**

*Bees and wasps*, including a variety of yellow jackets, are actually different insects with different behaviors.

Bees pollinate one third of all we eat. These helpful creatures are not aggressive. Focused on gathering nectar and pollen, the bees you see buzzing around the garden or the clover in your lawn will sting only in self defense when they are swatted or stepped on. Avoid them and bees will gladly avoid you. For a bee, stinging is truly a last resort used only to protect themselves. Their barbed stinger becomes embedded in the skin, allowing them to sting only once.

*Yellowjackets* are not bees, but actually a type of wasp. Identified by their telltale nipped-in waistline (as opposed to the bee’s round shape) certain types of yellowjackets can be more aggressive. Yellowjackets are omnivores, attracted to meat, sugar and other picnic food as well as other insects. They will often sting when unprovoked, and may become more aggressive if you interrupt their flight pattern by swinging at them. Unlike the bee, yellowjackets can sting repeatedly without harm to themselves.

**Avoid the sting**

- Don’t wear perfume or cologne, as bees can detect strong scent (don’t smell like a flower!)
- Wear neutral colored clothing (white, beige or black) as bees are attracted to bright colors (this is why beekeepers wear white)
- Wear pants and shirts that seals at the ankle and wrist to prevent insects from getting into your clothing
- Wear shoes especially on grassy areas
- Before drinking from a can or glass, peak inside to make sure a bee or wasp hasn’t dipped in for a taste
- Be cautious at the grill or table and near trash cans where yellow jackets tend to gather
- Do not swat or crush insects, as this makes them more aggressive. Insects also may send chemical signals when they are injured, inciting others to attack.
• As hard as it is, be very still if a yellowjacket or bee is buzzing around you, and move indoors if necessary.

**Recognize allergic reactions:**

Insects like bees actually inject venom when they sting, and this substance can cause an allergic reaction in some people.

*Know these signs of allergic reaction, and seek treatment immediately:*

- Coughing, choking
- Nausea
- Chest pain
- Rapid heart beat
- Swelling of lips, tongue or face
- Difficulty breathing
- Headache, dizziness
- Red bumps (hives) in places where you were not stung
- Swelling of the bite that worsens over time

**Soothe the sting**

- If you’ve been stung by a bee, look for the barbed stinger that may be embedded in your skin (it will look like a black dot in the center of the wound). Do not use your finger or tweezers as this may force it further into your skin. Instead, gently scrape the area with a credit card.
- In some cases, a stinger may need to be removed by doctor in a minor procedure to ensure that it is completely removed
- Gently wash the sting and surrounding area with soap and water
- Apply an ice pack to the sting for quick relief
- Use a calming lotion to stop pain and itching:
  - Sarna lotion - available over the counter in two forms: sensitive, and original, containing cooling menthol, phenol
  - Eucerin, Itch-X, and other gels and creams containing pramoxine – available over the counter
- Less severe inflammatory reactions may include thick, hive-like pink round bumps. These are generally treated with topical (or possibly oral) steroid creams or ointments.
- A variety of over-the-counter antihistamines such as such as Claritin, Zyrtec and Benadryl can help reduce the itch

*Learn more about how to address itching and rashes*