



# MID-JERSEY PEDIATRICS

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## HIVES (URTICARIA)

Hives are a very common disorder. At least 20% of the population, including children, will develop some form of hive-like eruptions in the course of a lifetime. Contrary to popular opinion, hives are not a disease. Caused by the release of chemicals called histamine, hives, also known as urticaria, are a symptom of some disorder or allergic mechanism going on in the body. Hives appear on the skin and mucous membranes in the form of itching, stinging, and burning wheals (welts) surrounded by a zone of redness.



Hives come in a variety of size and shapes, and can appear just about anywhere on your body. They may come and go over several days, and occasionally may persist for weeks, even if the cause is found and eliminated. When the wheals are very large and the loose tissue of the eyelids and lips swell to form actual disfigurement, the condition is called angioedema. Hives may involve the mucous membranes of the mouth and throat, and in extremely rare cases may even obstruct breathing. Like coughing or sneezing, which may signal a response to an upper respiratory infection or hay fever, hives are a clue which alerts us to abnormal goings-on in our system.

It may be extremely difficult to pinpoint the specific cause of a case of hives, mainly because the possibilities are endless. In the acute type of hives--where the itching and wheals appear quickly and fade in a few minutes or hours--it is somewhat easier to uncover the culprit; a strange food, an emotional upset, a penicillin injection, a new medication, or some recent infection such as chicken pox, mononucleosis, or an upper respiratory ailment. Unfortunately, in the chronic form, the cause is much more difficult to identify. The most common causes of hives are certain food and drugs. Strawberries, nuts, chocolate, fish and shellfish, milk, eggs, pork, oranges, bananas, and many other edibles can cause hives. Some people get hives from inhaling substances such as animal dander (from cats, dogs, or horses),

house dust, pollen, molds, certain plants and flour in bakeries. Others break out in hives when they touch something cold or when they touch something hot, and still others when they are exposed to sunlight. Some even get hives when pressure is applied to their skin, as in the shower. Anxiety is another known cause of hives.

### Treatment:

For acute, temporary hives, an over-the-counter antihistamine (Benadryl) taken orally usually relieves the symptoms promptly--at least until the next exposure to the culprit. Benadryl may be given as frequently as every six hours. Benadryl should be given until the hives have been gone for 24 hours. If this doesn't work, prescription medication might do the job. Your physician will know the right one to prescribe. Finding the cause of chronic, recurrent hives is often a difficult, frustrating, and lengthy process, and requires patience and extensive detective work. You, as a parent, must be the detective. What food did your child eat? What medication did he or she take? Is there anything new? Is there anything different? Has your child been in some strange place? What different inhalants or sprays has he or she been exposed to lately? Beginning an extensive work-up to find the cause is only necessary if the hives persist for several months, or after a severe case, especially if angioedema is present. See your doctor if your child's hives are persistent or severe. It is important that you provide as much information as you can to your pediatrician.

### Benadryl Dosage Chart:

Child's weight is more than:	Total amount in mg's	Dosage of Benadryl liquid	Dosage of Benadryl capsules (25mg)
22	10	¼ tsp	--
33	15	1 tsp	--
44	20	1 ½ tsp	--
55	25	2 tsp	1
110	50	--	2

WARNING: Do not give Benadryl to children under one year of age without consulting your pediatrician.