

# YOUR GPs CAN TREAT THESE CONDITIONS!

In January 2014, Eastern Health Alliance (EHA) launched the GPFIRST programme to encourage patients in the eastern region of Singapore to see their general practitioners (or GPs) for mild to moderate medical conditions. In this regular series, our EHA community GPs step in to help with common ailments *Caring* readers might face.

Visit [www.gpfirst.sg](http://www.gpfirst.sg) or see your GP for more information on common conditions such as cuts, bruises, mild scalds, nausea, nosebleeds, headaches, sprains and fevers. Read on to learn more about bee stings and asthma.

## BEE STINGS

**Question:** My five-year-old daughter was playing outdoors with our dog. Moments later, we heard her cry and spotted a bee on the ground. She had tried to step on the bee with her bare foot and was stung. Her whole foot swelled up and there was redness around the sting site. She also developed a slight fever. The swelling did not subside despite applying medication for pain and itchiness, so I took her to the A&E. Is it advisable to go to my GP should a similar incident happen again?



**Answer:** Being stung by a bee can be both painful and scary. If stung by a bee, you may initiate home treatment, but do visit your GP if you don't get better. Emergency care is rarely required except for severe allergic reactions.

After an insect sting, try the following:

- Apply a cold compress (a damp cloth wrapped around an ice pack) to the affected area.
- If you develop an itch, you can take an antihistamine such as cetirizine.
- To reduce pain and swelling, take a pain reliever such as ibuprofen.

If initial treatments do not help, or your pain/swelling gets worse, visit your GP, who will assess for signs and the severity of your allergic reaction and then prescribe additional medications to manage them. Symptoms of an allergic reaction include:

- Skin symptoms such as hives, redness or swelling, that may not necessarily be over the area that was stung (for example, the face or lips may swell after being stung on the hand)
- Tummy cramps, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea
- Hoarse voice, shortness of breath and difficulty breathing
- Lightheadedness, dizziness, fainting



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Severe allergic reactions – called anaphylaxis – may occur after a sting, and it is a medical emergency that can lead to death if not treated quickly. You can have an anaphylactic reaction the first time you are stung. Should you develop any symptoms of anaphylaxis (difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, swelling of the face or fainting), you need to get emergency care at a hospital as soon as possible. Call 995 for an ambulance.

It is important to be vigilant, especially of your children, to prevent stings from bees and other insects. It is advisable not to walk outside your house without shoes.

Bees and wasps that are away from their nest are not aggressive and only sting when threatened (such as after being swatted). If a stinging insect is near, slowly back away and do not wave your arms. If you are being swarmed or stung, cover your mouth and nose and run inside a building or an enclosed vehicle.

By Dr Kiran Kashyap

## ASTHMA

**Question:** I am a 39-year-old male with a history of childhood asthma. Occasionally, I experience wheezing and bad coughs especially during cold rainy nights, but these symptoms are generally well managed by applying a puff or two of my Ventolin inhaler. However, during a recent episode, I had difficulty breathing and experienced some tightness in my chest, and these symptoms persisted despite the use of Ventolin. I panicked that I might suffer an asthma attack and headed to the nearest A&E. I wondered if my GP could have managed my condition?

**Answer:** Asthma is a common condition that affects the airways. Typical symptoms are wheezing, coughing, tightness in the chest and shortness of breath, and such symptoms can range from mild to severe. From your history of occasional attacks relieved by Ventolin, it is likely that you have intermittent asthma. You are likely to have suffered an acute exacerbation

of asthma, which can be managed by your GP with oral or nebulised medications.

Once your acute asthmatic exacerbation has been resolved, your GP will then assess the severity of your asthma using tools such as asthma control test scores. He/she may also start you on asthma preventor medications (inhalational corticosteroids or long-acting bronchodilators) to prevent future attacks.

Patients with asthma should avoid the following common triggers:

- Infections (cough and colds)
- Pollens and moulds
- Certain medications (painkillers such as diclofenac, blood pressure medications such as atenolol or glaucoma eye drops such as timolol)
- Smoking (both active and passive)
- Haze and other air pollutants
- Extreme emotions (stress, emotional upset or even laughing too hard)
- Allergies to pets' fur (cats, dogs, rabbits)
- House dust mites
- Food allergies (rare in most cases for adult asthmatics)

Exercise may also trigger an attack, but it's also beneficial to those who suffer from asthma, so use a Ventolin inhaler if needed before exercise.

Consult your GP early once you begin to experience discomfort. Early intervention will prevent your condition from worsening and you can avoid unnecessary A&E admissions.

By Dr Kelvin Goh Tze Chien



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