
SELF

Here's Exactly How to Treat Those Mosquito Bites All Over Your Body

Sometimes you're a literal snack.



When you have a ton of mosquito bites, it's like you're suddenly enrolled in a master class on willpower. You *really* want to scratch the bites, but giving in will only make the problem worse.

“Don’t scratch!” Cynthia Bailey, M.D., a diplomate of the American Board of Dermatology and president and CEO of Advanced Skin Care and Dermatology Inc., tells SELF. “This will lead to scabs, sores, and possible skin infections.”

It might feel easier to walk away from a million dollars than to not scratch, but try your best. Beyond that, what can you do after a bunch of mosquitoes have made a meal out of you? We consulted several dermatologists to figure out how to treat mosquito bites so you can relieve the itch ASAP.

When you get a mosquito bite, your body reacts with an immune response that leads to those signature pesky symptoms.

Mosquito bites cause that intense itchiness because they prompt your body to release histamine, a compound involved in your body’s immune response, **Gary Goldenberg, M.D.**, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital, tells SELF. Specifically, it’s the proteins in mosquitoes’ saliva that trigger your skin to get that itchy, red bump, according to the Mayo Clinic.

Scratching injures your skin further, causing even more of a histamine response that makes you itchier, Misha Rosenbach, M.D., associate professor of dermatology in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, tells SELF. That’s why scratching might make you sigh with relief for a moment, but the itchy sensation typically comes back with a vengeance.

While it’s possible to get a mosquito bite that’s merely annoying but clears up in a few days, you can also get something called skeeter syndrome, which is a more intense allergic reaction to the proteins in mosquito saliva, according to the Mayo Clinic. It’s not life-threatening, thankfully, but it’s still terrible. Think of your typical mosquito bite on steroids: Instead of just an itchy bump, if you have skeeter syndrome you’ll deal with a much large area of swelling that may also be sore and redder than usual, along with possible fever, hives, and swollen lymph nodes. The older you get, the less likely you are to develop skeeter syndrome since you become desensitized to these proteins over time, the Mayo Clinic says.

Your options for dealing with mosquito-induced discomfort range from topical creams to cool compresses and more.

Everyone is different, but these remedies may be able to help you:

- 1. Slather on calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream.** Calamine lotion is formulated to relieve itching and discomfort, and over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream helps reduce swelling, redness, and itching.
- 2. Use a cool compress.** Apply an ice pack or cool, wet cloth to the bite, the Mayo Clinic says. The cold temperature causes the dilated blood vessels near the surface of your skin to narrow, limiting inflammation, Dr. Rosenbach says. Plus, it just feels soothing.
- 3. Moisturize regularly.** When your skin is dry, it’s more prone to irritation and itchiness. It’s important to keep moisturizing when you have mosquito bites, Dr. Bailey says. To really help lock in moisture, try using a gentle cream or lotion when you get out of the bath or shower and your skin is still wet. For added relief and to help decrease inflammation, Dr. Goldenberg suggests putting your moisturizer in the fridge before you use it.
- 4. Take an over-the-counter antihistamine.** If you’re really struggling, the Mayo Clinic recommends taking an antihistamine to help combat the itch. “Oral antihistamines are often helpful,” Dr. Rosenbach says, especially if

you have multiple bites or skeeter syndrome. This goes back to the whole reason your bites are itchy in the first place: Your body releases histamine when you have a bite, and antihistamines help blunt that reaction, Dr. Bailey explains. Dr. Goldenberg recommends looking for an oral antihistamine that says it starts working within an hour but also aims to have a 24-hour effect.

5. Mix up a DIY baking soda paste. If you don't have the above options on hand, the Mayo Clinic recommends combining baking soda with a little water to make a paste that may feel soothing. Dr. Goldenberg suggests trying four parts baking soda to one part water so your paste is a good, thick consistency. Experts aren't exactly sure why this may help, but feel free to give it a try if you're curious.

Definitely call your doctor if you develop any kind of intense symptoms after a mosquito bite.

That includes fever, joint pain, red eyes, headache, or fatigue. These could be signs that you've having a severe allergic reaction to the bites or have been infected by a mosquito-borne disease, like Zika or West Nile virus.

Otherwise, consider trying out these tips to protect yourself from mosquito bites. While no bite-prevention plan will be foolproof, if you really hate these suckers, every little bit helps.