

SPIDER BITES: SYMPTOMS & TREATMENT OPTIONS

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There are around 100,000 species of spiders worldwide. Spiders can be found in garages, basements, attics, cabinets, sheds, gardens, woodpiles, in garbage, under tree bark, and inside of homes. Spiders have four pairs of legs and fangs at the ends of their mouths to bite prey and inject venom. Spider bites are relatively rare. However, spiders may bite when they feel threatened, such as when they are wedged between a part of the human body and an object. Most spider bites are harmless, as spider venom is not thought to be toxic to humans. Generally, a spider will not bite multiple members of the same household. Some spider bites are painful, while other bites are painless. A spider bite will usually resolve on its own within 7-10 days. The skin site should be watched, as spider bites can get infected.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF A SPIDER BITE:

- Raised, red bump(s)
- Mild, moderate, or severe pain
- Pain a few hours after the bite

RARE SYMPTOMS OF A SPIDER BITE:

- Flu-like symptoms, including fevers, sweating, nausea, and vomiting
- Swelling
- Seizures
- Shock
- Increases in blood pressure
- Muscle aches
- Vision changes
- Chest pain
- Life-threatening allergic reaction
- Excessive saliva
- Kidney failure
- Belly pain
- Abnormal heart rate or rhythm
- Muscle contractions
- Skin tissue death
- Death is possible

HOME TREATMENT OF A SPIDER BITE:

- Wash the skin with soap and water.
- Apply an ice pack to the bite for 15 minutes at a time. Wrap the ice pack in a towel to protect the skin.
- Keep the bitten area raised above the level of the heart, if possible.
- Take over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medication, such as Ibuprofen.
- Collect the spider if possible or try to remember what the spider looked like, so that the type of spider can be determined.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR FOR A SPIDER BITE:

- Tetanus shot, particularly if last tetanus shot was more than 5 years ago
- Antibiotics if there are signs of infection, including but not limited to: fevers, redness, swelling, pain, and pus
- Prescription medications to treat pain, inflammation, nausea, vomiting, muscle spasms, and muscle contractions. In rare cases, epinephrine may be given for a life-threatening allergic reaction.
- Anti-venom to treat severe symptoms (such as muscle pain and spasms). Need for anti-venom is based on symptoms
- Hospitalization for pain control if pain is severe and surgery to remove any dead skin tissue

SOURCE(S): Auerbach, Paul S. *Wilderness Medicine, Sixth Edition.* Maryland Heights: Mosby, 2011. Print; Forgey, William W., M.D. *Wilderness Medical Society Practice Guidelines for Wilderness Emergency Care, 5th Edition.* Guilford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. Print; McManners, Hugh. *The Complete Wilderness Training Book.* New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 1998. Print; and UpToDate.com.

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