

Urticaria (Hives)

Background:

- Common skin condition, 20% of people in lifetime
- Pruritic raised wheal with erythematous flare
- May be associated with angioedema
- Divided broadly into acute vs. chronic
- Most cases acute urticaria, self limited
- May be allergic or non-allergic



RED FLAGS:

- Burning > itch
- >24 hours per lesion
- Purpura
- Blistering
- Bruising
- Scarring

Acute urticaria (<6 weeks)

- Infections
 - Bacterial (mycoplasma, streptococcal pharyngitis)
 - Viral (EBV, coxsackieviruses, hepatitis)
 - Fungal
 - Parasitic
- Foods (Peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, cow's milk, egg, wheat, soy, sesame most common, also strawberries = direct mast cell activator)
- Drugs (NSAIDS, opioids)
- Insect stings (honeybee, wasp, hornet, yellow jacket, fire ant)
- Contact allergy
- Transfusion reactions

Chronic urticaria (Many days per week for >6 weeks)

- Idiopathic/autoimmune (60-70%)
- Physical/ chronic inducible urticaria (30%)
 - Dermographism
 - Cholinergic
 - Cold/Heat
 - Delayed pressure
 - Aquagenic
 - Vibratory
 - Solar
- Autoimmune diseases
- Autoinflammatory syndrome
- Neoplastic

Urticaria (Hives)

Diagnosis:

- History and physical
- Special tests:
 - Cold provocation
 - Pressure test
 - Heat provocation
 - Vibratory provocation
- No investigations needed in acute urticaria with no obvious food/drug trigger, no red flags
- Can consider CBC, ESR, CRP in cases of chronic urticaria
- Skin biopsy if concern of urticarial vasculitis



Cold urticaria following provocation test

Management:

Acute urticaria

- Trigger avoidance
- Second generation antihistamine
- Refer if suspected food/drug allergy

Chronic urticaria

- Identify and eliminate underlying causes or avoid triggers
- Second generation antihistamine given daily with up to 3x regular dose for break-through hives
- If symptoms not well controlled or intolerable refer

Prognosis:

- Acute urticaria resolve when trigger eliminated
- Chronic urticaria persist an average of 3-5 years
 - Typically eventually self-limited
 - Can significantly impact QoL