

FIRST AID: REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Ah, Summer, what power you have to make us suffer and like it.” When Russell Baker wrote those words he may have had in mind all the bites, stings, sprains, strains, and rashes the season brings. It's the time of year when a little knowledge of first aid can go a long way, and since pharmacists are the first line of defense against the slings and arrows of outrageous summer, *PRN* presents the following review of current recommendations.

Bee and Wasp Stings

Most bee or wasp stings require only simple home treatment. Individuals known to have severe or anaphylactic reactions to stings should use EpiPen or a similar product (adults and children ≥ 30 kg 0.3 mg IM, children < 30 kg 0.15 mg IM) and call emergency services immediately. Those without severe allergy should follow the procedure below:

1. If the stinger is still present, remove it immediately by scraping it with a hard-edged object such as a credit card.
2. Apply an ice pack or cold water for 10 to 30 minutes.
3. Wash the area and apply either hydrocortisone cream, calamine lotion, or a baking soda and water paste.
4. If needed, antihistamines (diphenhydramine) and pain relievers (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) may be used.

Poison Ivy, Oak, and Sumac

The rash caused by poison ivy, oak, and sumac, known as Rhus Dermatitis, is due to contact with an oily plant resin called urushiol. After exposure, a reaction is likely unless the oil can be washed off immediately (less than 10 minutes). The rash is self-limiting, generally resolving in 1 to 3 weeks. Treatments to relieve symptoms include:

1. Hydrocortisone cream may be helpful if used early in the course of the rash.
2. Cool compresses several times a day and cool water baths with colloidal oatmeal (Aveeno) may reduce symptoms.
3. Oral antihistamines (diphenhydramine) can be used to reduce itching.

In more severe cases, oral steroids may be prescribed. In that case it is important that treatment continue for at least 2 to 3 weeks, as use of short-course “dosepacks” can lead to a severe rebound of symptoms.

Cuts and Scrapes

Minor cuts and scrapes can be self-treated. Deep wounds, puncture wounds (especially of the feet), and dirty wounds may require medical care and a tetanus shot. For minor cuts, treat as follows:

1. Stop any bleeding by applying pressure continuously. If after 20 minutes of pressure, bleeding continues, seek medical attention.
2. Clean the wound with soap and water or plain water.
3. Apply antibiotic ointment. If previous use led to a rash, this was likely due to neomycin; in that case use plain bacitracin.

Insect and Spider Bites

The majority of insect and spider bites are not serious and respond to self-treatment. The two exceptions are bites from either Black Widow and Brown Recluse spiders, which require immediate medical attention. The Black Widow spider is recognizable by the red hourglass marking on its belly, and the Brown Recluse by the violin-shaped mark on its upper back area. Bites from mosquitoes and other non-venomous insects can be treated as follows:

1. Wash the area of the bite with soap and water.
2. Apply an ice pack or cold compress.
3. Oral antihistamines (diphenhydramine) or topical corticosteroids may be used if needed.
4. In more severe reactions, a short course of oral steroids may be necessary.

Sprains and Strains

Sprains are stretched or torn *ligaments*, while **strains** are stretched or torn *muscles*. Minor injuries can be self-treated, but more severe sprains and strains may require professional evaluation. Immediate medical care is indicated if a popping sound is heard when the injury occurs, if the affected limb is unstable, if the area becomes hot and red and a fever develops, or if there is no improvement after 2 to 3 days. Minor sprains and strains can be treated at home using the **PRINCE** protocol:

- **Protect** the injured area.
- **Rest** the injured area. This protects against further injury and facilitates healing.
- **Ice** the injured area for up to 20 minutes at a time every 1 to 2 hours while awake for the first 24 to 48 hours (use an ice pack or slush bath; do not apply ice directly to the skin).
- **NSAIDs** or acetaminophen may be used to relieve pain.
- **Compression**: an elastic compression wrap (e.g. ACE bandage) reduces swelling and should be worn for the first 24 to 36 hours. The wrap should be applied to fit snugly, but not too tightly, as circulation may be restricted.
- **Elevation**: elevation of the injured area above the level of the heart whenever possible reduces swelling by allowing edema fluid to drain.