

## Winning the Battle Against Mosquitoes and Black Flies

Days are getting longer and the sun is getting warmer, spring has finally arrived. Although these changes bring on a welcoming alternative to the long winter months, there is one thing I am sure most people could do without. This of course is the return of those persistent mosquitoes and black flies. Although these insects, and their accompanying bites are often no more than annoying, they can have a pretty significant impact on your day. I know for myself growing up in the country, any outdoor work around this time of year usually meant wearing head-to-toe mosquito netting and a decent coat of insect repellent.

Black flies and especially mosquitoes tend to be most active at dawn and at dusk, therefore you are most likely to get bitten around these times. Ideally the best thing to do is stay inside, but this is often not possible or desirable. Luckily there are many things you can do to prevent bites from these insects. Though no method is 100% effective and most people will get bitten at some point. That in mind, there are also many treatment options available to control the symptoms of insect bites after they occur.

Normal signs and symptoms of mosquito and black fly bites may include itching and the appearance a soft bump on your skin. Immediately after a bite this bump will be pale in color but will slowly turn to a pink or red as time goes on. People that are more sensitive to insect bites will have a much larger area of itching and discoloration. Although the signs and symptoms of insect bites will typically go away in a few days there are some potential complications you should be aware of. Scratching insect bites could cause them to become infected, and require a trip to your doctor for an antibiotic. Also, even though it is rare, it is possible to develop a severe allergic reaction to these bites with symptoms ranging from hives to difficulty breathing. If this were to occur be sure to seek medical attention immediately.

There are many things you can do to lessen the symptoms of insect bites. Initially, if you know you have been bitten by a mosquito or black fly you should wash the area with soap and water to help minimize the reaction. An ice-pack or cool facecloth can then be used to decrease any swelling, and if itching is a concern an over-the-counter antihistamine (Benadryl, etc.) and/or hydrocortisone cream may be used.

Although it is good to know how to treat insect bites after they occur, ideally you want to prevent them from happening in the first place. Mosquitoes need stagnant water to breed; therefore by eliminating standing water (unclogging roof gutters, emptying children's wading pools, draining collected water in fire pits, etc.) you can reduce the population around your home and yard. Another thing you can do is wear protective clothing, which may include long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and light-colored clothing, as some insects are more attracted to darker colors. And finally, insect repellants may be used. One of

the most popular products this time of year, insect repellents are safe for both kids and adults when used properly.

No matter how much of an annoyance insect bites may seem, it is important to know that many treatment options exist. But of course one of the best things you can do is prevent them from happening in the first place. Be sure to talk to your pharmacist or family physician if you have any questions. Remember your health is our number one priority!

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