

Urticaria and 'Hive-Like' Breakouts

Most people are familiar with the term 'hives'. They typically present as itchy, raised 'welts' which can occur nearly anywhere on the body – including the scalp, groin, hands, and feet. In dermatology, we use the term *urticaria* instead of 'hives'. Despite popular belief, most cases of *urticaria* are not due to an allergy. Instead, they usually happen for no identifiable reason at all.

Medicines called *antihistamines* are the primary treatment for *urticaria*. The most common is Benadryl[®], although there are many other prescription and over-the-counter brands as well.

What many people don't realize is that some of the medicines used for controlling stomach acid are actually a type of antihistamine also. These would include medicines like *cimetidine* (Tagamet[®]) and *ranitidine* (Zantac[®]). Even though these are usually used for heartburn, they can be particularly helpful when someone has difficult-to-control breakouts.

The first goal with treating *urticaria* is to simply relieve the inflammation and itching. After doing so, most cases resolve without further testing. If needed, a biopsy or allergy testing may be considered. But again, usually no specific cause is found and ultimately we just have to allow time for the *urticaria* to quit flaring on its own.

YOUR TREATMENT PLAN

- 1) Please do your best to avoid any activity which stimulates blood flow to the surface of the skin. Avoid hot temperatures - including hot baths and showers. Even scratching and rubbing can also make the *urticaria* flare worse.
- 2) Although allergens usually don't play a role, if there is a strong suspicion that a certain allergen did cause your breakout, then do your best to avoid it.
- 3) Aspirin and other 'NSAIDs' (such as Advil[®], Aleve[®], etc.) can contribute to *urticaria*. If you are taking any such medications, please consider discontinuing their use. NOTE: If you're prescribed aspirin by your PCP or heart doctor, we would ask that you seek their approval before stopping it.
- 4) For the best results, the key is to provide steady coverage with the recommended medications throughout the day. We're recommending the following:

Morning	Afternoon	Evening