

Living Better with Allergies

Is there an Allergic Component to Chronic Hives?

Urticaria- the medical term for hives, can be acute or chronic, and it depends on the duration of symptoms. Hives typically last less than 12 hours and can spread from one location to another, its raised, pink and itchy and usually responds to antihistamines such as diphenhydramine or other longer acting antihistamines like fexofenadine or cetirizine. Acute hives can last less than 6 weeks and there usually can be an identifiable cause such as a food or drug allergy or a viral infection, however, about 60% of the time, it can be idiopathic, meaning, the cause is unknown. If the hives, persist off and on for over 6 weeks on a daily or weekly basis, this is called chronic urticaria (CU). Chronic urticaria, can affect a patient's quality of life tremendously, as patients can become depressed, lack sleep and energy due to their chronic symptoms. The decrease of quality of life is comparable as if one were to have coronary heart disease. Unfortunately, detecting the cause of chronic urticaria is not easy, as about 80% of the time a cause is not found. It's thought that chronic urticaria could be autoimmune. However, despite the etiology, the management of this condition is still the same. Interestingly, food allergy is often suspected to be a major cause of chronic hives, however the evidence is weak that pseudoallergen-free diets lead to improvement in the course of chronic urticaria and therefore, food allergy evaluation for chronic hives is usually not recommended, unless there is one particular food to which the patient has a strong association of symptoms. Hives can be irritating and frustrating to treat, but they typically improve with an antihistamine regimen. For cases of chronic hives that don't respond to antihistamines, there are other alternative treatments available, including a new biologic (Xolair) omalizumab that can be given once a month at our office. A board certified allergist should be able to help determine whether a patient is a good candidate for this medication. For more tips and tricks about hives, contact us at Asthma and Allergy Clinic at asthmaandallergyva.com, follow us on facebook at facebook.com/AsthmaAllergyDocs or call us to schedule an appointment at The Asthma and Allergy Clinic of Dr. Sweeney and Palacios-Kibler 757.483.4150 or 757.539.7771