



Bee stings and how to deal with them

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Why do bees sting?

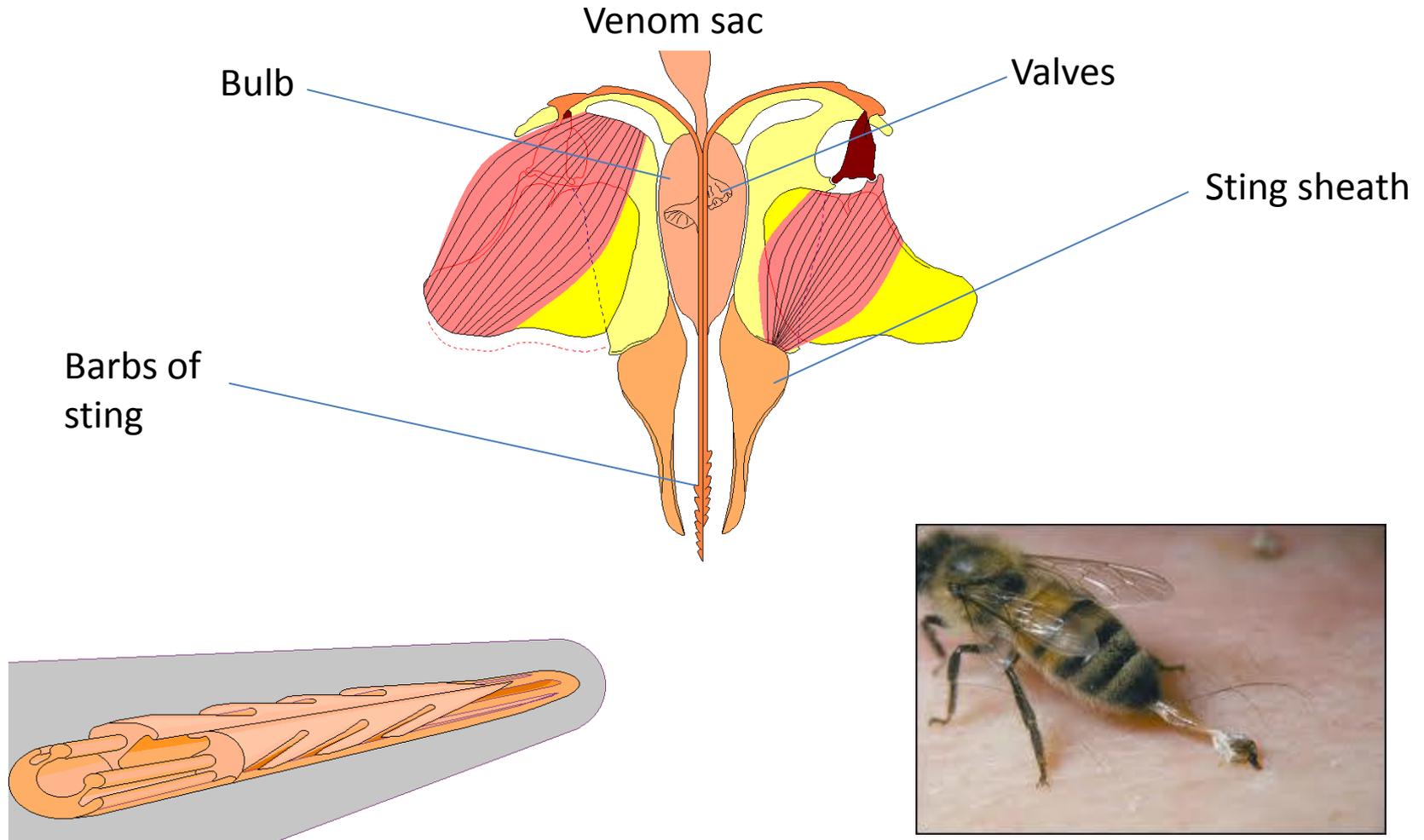
Bees tend to sting:

- When they are trapped e.g. in protective clothing
- When they are defending the colony from attack e.g. wasps
- If they feel grumpy e.g. bad weather, queenless
- If they feel threatened by you e.g. sudden movements, banging the hive
- If another bee has stung someone or something and released the attack pheromone

.....Or they may just be bad tempered bees!



What is a bee sting?

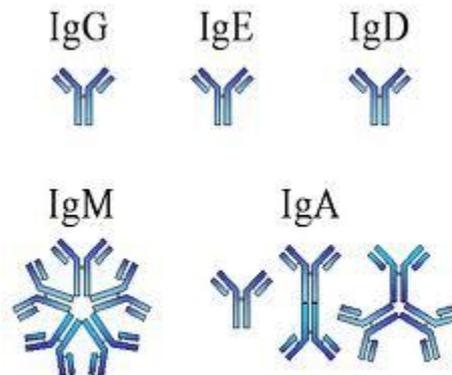


How does the body react?

In response to bee stings the body releases IgG and IgE antibodies.

IgG – most common type of antibody, found in all body fluids and protects against viruses, bacteria and foreign particles

IgE – triggers cells to release the chemical histamine, which causes some of the symptoms we recognise as allergies. Found in lungs, skin and mucous membranes



What do you see?

After 2 minutes - redness



After 6 minutes – sting removed



After 27 minutes – swelling to knuckle



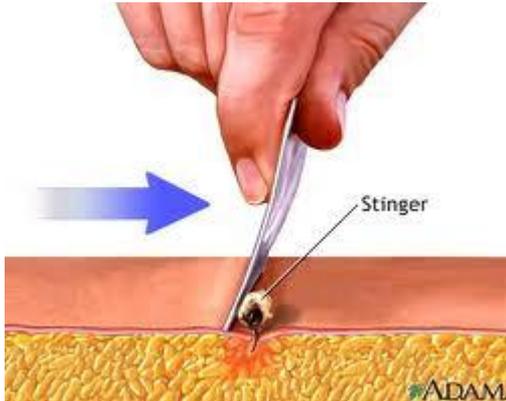
1 day to 1 week –
itching, swelling



Some places are worse than others!



What is the treatment?



General consensus – can remove sting by any means, it is the speed that counts

Antihistamine tablets and ointments can help reduce itching. Ice packs will reduce swelling

Other remedies suggested include

- Lemon juice
- Paste of tobacco
- Salt
- Baking soda
- Toothpaste
- Clay
- Garlic or onions
- Urine

There are also other 'natural' remedies available



More serious reactions

Important to remember not that common – about 2% of population

In latest Resuscitation Council report, out of 49 anaphylactic reactions to stings only 4 related to bees

However when it does occur can be life threatening in a very short period of time



Life threatening reactions

Anaphylactic shock

Airway problems – swelling, feel like throat closing up

Breathing difficulties - hoarse, wheezing, confused, tired

Circulatory problems – dizziness, headache, pale, clammy,

Disability – “sense of impending doom”, anxiety, decreased consciousness

Exposure – skin changes e.g. rash, swelling

Person

- may have heart attack (cardiac arrest)
- stop breathing (respiratory arrest)



Management

Remove the sting as quickly as possible

Move the person away from the bees to avoid further stings

Dial 999 or 112 – explain exactly what has happened and ask for a paramedic

If the person carries an EpiPen and you know how to use it
.....give it.

Alternatively tell the person on the phone and they may talk you through how to give it.



If breathing is difficult the person may want to sit up, raise the feet if you can

If the person is unconscious put them in the recovery position

Be prepared

If you know you have bad reactions to insect bites or other significant allergies - you may have a bad reaction to bee stings

Explain to others how you might react and what they can do to help

If you carry an Epi-pen make sure you always carry it with you when you go to your hives and that whoever accompanies you knows how to use it and where you keep it – it could save your life

If you check your bees alone – take your mobile and let someone know where you are and how long you are likely to be.



Even better.....

Avoid getting stung in the first place



- Wear correctly fitting protective clothing, gloves and boots
- Avoid strong smelling perfumes, deodorants, soaps etc
- Get to know your bees, the buzz they make when happy or not so happy
- Choose the right time for inspections – when the majority of bees are flying
- Use the smoker correctly – frequent small puffs
- Do not knock or jar the hive or make sudden movements when handling frames
- Move slowly and deliberately
- Bees will be bad tempered if queenless, the weather is overcast, windy or wet, when they are under attack e.g. wasps

On the plus side

You can now be treated by an apitherapist who will happily apply bees to your skin or affected area and encourage them to sting you

Many tribes believe that the bee sting has magical properties – the more stings you receive the more empowered you will be

For many years bee stings have been seen as a means of reducing the symptoms of arthritis and multiple sclerosis

