

## PATIENT INFORMATION ON URTICARIA (HIVES)

### What are Urticaria?

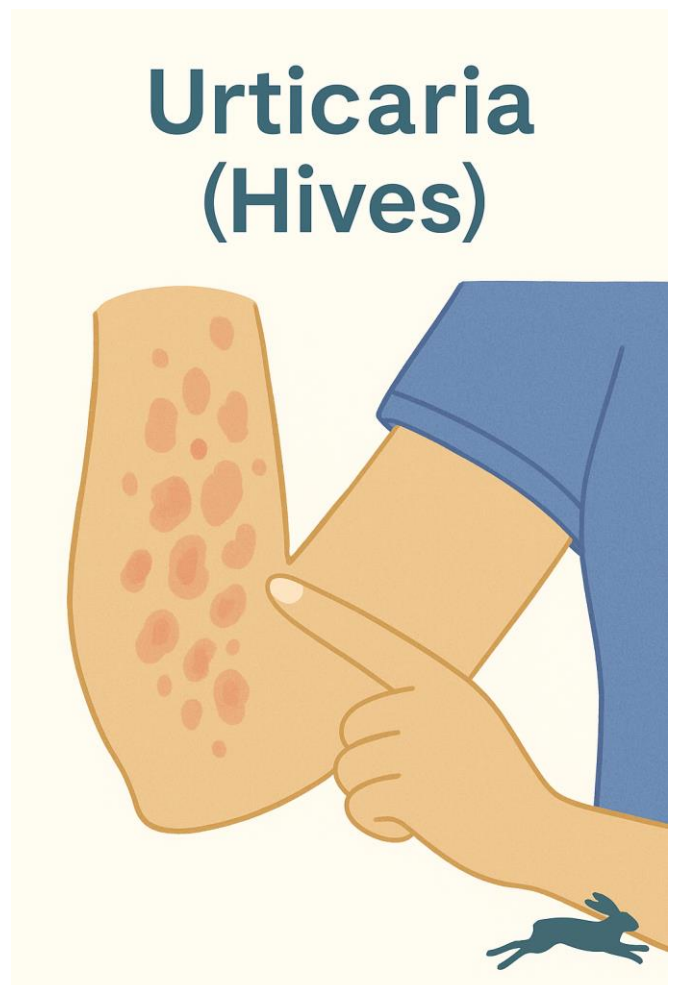
Urticaria - also called hives, weals, welts, or nettle rash – is a raised, itchy skin rash that appears suddenly. The rash typically fades within 24 hours, but new patches may appear elsewhere. Episodes may last for days or, in some cases, recur for months or years.

### Types of Urticaria

- **Acute urticaria:** Clears within 6 weeks.
- **Chronic urticaria:** Lasts more than 6 weeks or recurs frequently.
- **Urticarial vasculitis:** Rare, painful, long-lasting weals that may leave bruising.

### What Causes Chronic Urticaria?

Chronic urticaria is rarely caused by allergies. Instead, it often results from an overactive immune system (autoimmune). In around 60% of cases, antibodies (IgG) trigger allergy cells in the skin. Around 1 in 7 people also have autoimmune thyroid disease.

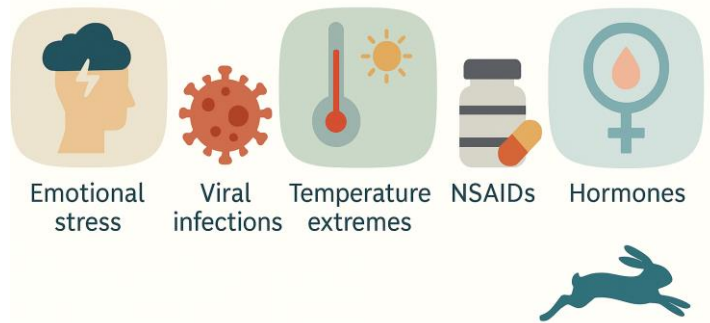


## Common Triggers and Flare Factors

Even without an allergy, symptoms may worsen with:

- Viral infections
- Emotional stress
- Hormonal changes (e.g. menstruation, menopause)
- Heat, cold, or sunlight
- Pressure or friction on the skin
- NSAIDs (e.g. ibuprofen)

### Urticaria (Hives)



## Treatment Approach

Most people improve over time. Treatment aims to control symptoms:

### 1. *First-line: Daily antihistamines*

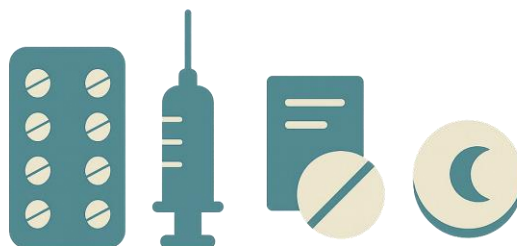
- Start with non-drowsy types like cetirizine, loratadine, or fexofenadine.
- If needed, your GP may advise gradually increasing to up to 4 tablets/day.

### 2. *Add-on treatments if symptoms persist:*

- Montelukast – helps block another allergic pathway.
- Famotidine – an H2 blocker used alongside antihistamines.
- Mirtazapine – dual antihistamine with added mood stabilisation effect.
- Omalizumab – injection used for severe or resistant cases (hospital specialist).

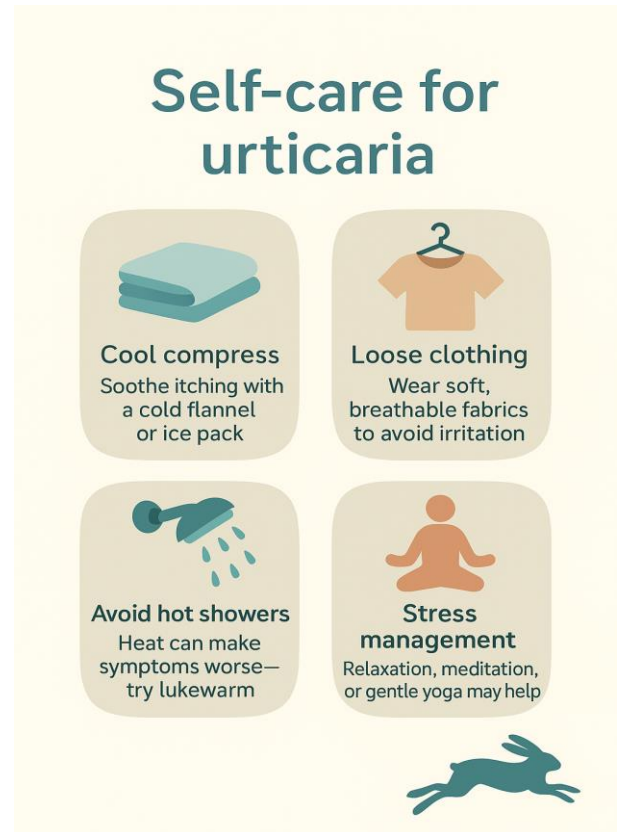
### 3. *Investigations and supplements:*

- Blood tests may check for thyroid issues or autoimmune markers.
- Low vitamin D levels can worsen symptoms – treatment may help.



## Practical Self-Care

- Keep a symptom and trigger diary.
- Use cool compresses and emollients for comfort.
- Wear soft, loose-fitting clothing.
- Avoid overheating or hot baths.
- Manage stress with relaxation techniques.



## When to Seek Medical Help

*Call 999 or go to A&E if:*

- You have swelling of lips, tongue, or throat.
- You struggle to breathe or feel faint – this may signal anaphylaxis.
- If you have *Angioedema* – deeper swelling under the skin (e.g. lips, eyes, hands, genitals) is common in chronic urticaria and usually improves with antihistamines. Seek urgent help if it affects your throat or breathing.



*Speak to your GP if:*

- Rash lasts longer than 6 weeks
- Symptoms interfere with daily life
- You're concerned about swelling or medication side effects

## Living with urticaria

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Urticaria can affect your confidence, comfort, and mood—especially when symptoms are visible or unpredictable.

If it's getting you down, speak to your GP. Support and treatment options are available.

## Further Reading and Support

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- **NHS: Urticaria (Hives):** <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nettle-rash-urticaria/>
- **British Association of Dermatologists – Chronic Urticaria:** <https://www.bad.org.uk/pils/chronic-urticaria/>
- **Allergy UK:** <https://www.allergyuk.org> Helpline: 01322 619898

## If you have further questions:

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- **Visit:** [www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/contact-us](http://www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/contact-us) and fill out our triage form
- **Speak to your local pharmacist**
- **Call us:** 01285 653198 or 01285 652122
- **Call NHS 111** if you need urgent medical advice (24/7)
- **Call 999** in an emergency

