



Beauty / Skin-Care Tips

6 Derm-Approved Home Remedies for the Itchiest of Itchy Bug Bites



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I'm one of those people who gets totally eaten up by mosquitos within minutes of stepping outside. Why are mosquitos attracted to me? I don't know if it's because of my blood type or because "I'm so sweet," as my mom says, but it's safe to say I'm not a fan of bug bites that cause itchiness for days. Since making an X with my fingernails stopped working after the second grade, I've been left trying to find

other bug bite itch remedies. While there are plenty of creams you can pick up at the pharmacy, there are also a number of home remedies for bug bites that provide natural itch relief.

"There's no need for topical steroids, calamine lotion, or Benadryl," says dermatologist [Keira L. Barr, MD](#), founder and chief wellness officer of [Resilient Health Institute](#). "Just look in your kitchen for some 'in a pinch' skin relief for bug bites." In other words, no worries if you don't have special [lotion for itchy skin](#) on hand. You likely already have everything you need.

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EXPERTS IN THIS ARTICLE

- [Keira L. Barr, MD](#), board-certified physician and menopause expert
- [Loretta Ciraldo, MD, FAAD](#), board-certified dermatologist and founder of Dr. Loretta Skincare
- [Teresa Song, MD](#), board-certified dermatologist at Marmur Medical

Whether you want to take a bath for bug bites or dab on some solutions you've already got hiding in your cabinets (like witch hazel, tea tree oil, or baking soda), we've got you covered with DIY bug bite treatments. Keep reading for six derm-approved home remedies.

When you should see a doctor for bug bites

Before we dive into the home remedies for bug bites that swell and itch, it's important to note that there are some bites that might require more serious medical attention. While mosquito bites are usually easily identifiable as an itchy, red bump on your skin, there are others that can be more serious. For example, tick bites—which can leave behind a tell-tale "bulls-eye" rash—can also spread Lyme disease or Rocky Mountain spotted fever, depending on the type of tick. Additionally, if your bug bite comes with a [side of fever, swelling, or joint pain](#),

seek medical attention immediately rather than reaching for a natural remedy.

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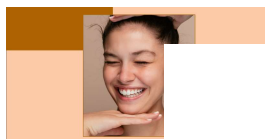
As a rule of thumb, experts recommend seeing a doctor if the bug bite doesn't resolve or gets worse after a week. Another sign to look for: "a red streak coming up around the area, which can signify an infection that is getting into your blood, usually from scratching too much," says [Loretta Ciraldo, MD, FAAD](#), a Miami-based board-certified dermatologist and founder of [Dr. Loretta skincare](#). If the notice a honey color crust or pus, that's also an indication to go see a doctor. "These are usually signs of either a strep or staph infection in the bite," Dr. Ciraldo says.

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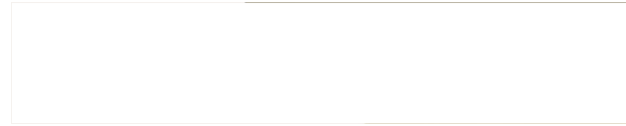
Lastly, if the bug bite home treatments and insect bite relief tips below don't work, pay your doctor a visit.

How to prevent bug bites

To prevent insects from feasting on your sweet flesh in the first place, there are [a few things you can do](#). Cover up (especially your arms and legs) when you're out walking or hiking to deter ticks, mosquitos, and fleas. Clothing also works as sun protection. And always remember to wear bug spray (pro tip: the ingredient picaridin is a great [mosquito repellent for sensitive skin](#)), or a [pregnancy-safe mosquito repellent](#) if you're expecting. [Teresa Song, MD, FAAD](#), a board-certified dermatologist at [Marmur Medical](#), recommends applying bug

spray or [insect repellent stickers](#) onto your clothing as well before outdoor activities for extra protection.

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Citronella candles and portable fans when you're sitting outside are always a good option, too. And if you're camping or taking the kiddos for a walk in their stroller, mosquito nets are essential, Dr. Song adds.

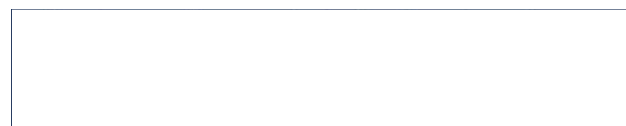
That said, sometimes bugs just love to bite... so here are some reliable home remedies for bug bites that actually work, according to experts.

6 home remedies for bug bites that promise quick itch relief

1. Oatmeal bath for bug bites

You know how [oatmeal baths](#) are a must when you come into contact with poison ivy? It's also a soothing—and super relaxing!—strategy for alleviating itchy bug bites. Especially if you have them all over your body.

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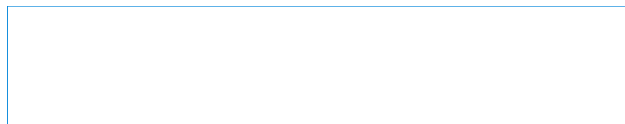


"[Colloidal oatmeal](#) is simply oats that have been ground and boiled to extract their skin-healing properties," Dr. Barr says. "Oatmeal is rich in antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and lipids. It's anti-inflammatory with itch-relieving benefits, helps restore the skin barrier, moisturizes the skin, and reduces inflammation to soothe irritated and itchy skin due to any cause." So slip into an oatmeal bath for bug bites, and feel the relief wash over you (pun very much intended) almost instantly.

2. Baking soda for bug bites

Rubbing baking soda on bug bites probably isn't something you want to do before you head out for the day, but it's the perfect home remedy for bug bites when you have a few hours of chill time. "Add a few drops of water to some baking soda, mix it into a paste, apply it directly onto bug bites, and allow it to dry," Barr says. "The alkalinity of baking soda can help neutralize the pH of an infected area and reduce itching."

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3. Witch hazel for bug bites

Witch hazel is known for being able to clear up pimples like magic, and it's also a dermatologist-approved itch relief remedy, according to Dr. Barr. Simply apply a small amount of witch hazel extract directly to the skin with a cotton ball, or dilute it in a carrier oil—like coconut or jojoba—to create a cream that can help with itching, irritation, and inflammation.

"Witch hazel is a type of plant native to North America, and its bark, twigs and leaves are rich in polyphenols and tannins, which are added to water or alcohol to make a concentrated product called witch hazel extract," Dr. Barr explains. "While the tannins give witch hazel its astringent properties—removing oil from the skin and killing bacteria in our pores, making it a go-to for acne treatment—the polyphenols, including proanthocyanidins, provide anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties that soothe itching, reduce inflammation, and speed up healing."

4. Tea tree oil for bug bites

Add tea tree oil to the list of essential oils for itchy skin. Like witch hazel, tea tree oil is famous for its acne-fighting powers, but it can actually be super soothing for itchy bug bites, too. Simply apply a few drops (plus a carrier oil) to a cotton ball or pad, then dab on the bite.

5. Frozen popcorn kernels, peas, or ice cubes for bug bites

It turns out anything cold is your BFF when it comes to soothing itchy insect bites. "Ice cubes or a frozen bag of peas or popcorn kernels can be a surprisingly effective remedy for mosquito bites," Dr. Barr says. "The ice numbs the area and helps control swelling. Wrap the cubes in a towel and press

against your bites for 10 minutes, or for as long as you can tolerate.”

6. Organic tea bags for bug bites

Those tea bags in your cupboard can be used for so much more than a warm and cozy beverage, including relieving insect bite discomfort.

“Chamomile, calendula, and green tea offer anti-inflammatory benefits,” Dr. Barr says. “Green tea is rich in polyphenols called catechins, which help reduce irritation, redness, and swelling. In addition to polyphenols, the natural tannins in tea act as an astringent, drawing toxins out of the skin and helping to lessen your discomfort. Just press a used tea bag against your bites until the itching subsides.”

Home remedies for bug bites FAQs

Okay but really, what is the fastest way to heal bug bites naturally?

In addition to the above home remedies for bug bites, taking proper care of bug bites is also key for a fast recovery. At the top of the dermatologist-recommended itch remedies is applying ice on the bug bite on and off for an hour or so as soon as you notice it. “This will minimize the amount redness and itch that develops,” Dr. Ciraldo says. Whatever you do, don’t apply heat, which will increase the swelling and itchiness.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, don’t pick or scratch the bug bite. Yes, that is easier said than done but messing with the bug bite will only inflame it and prolong its healing or possibly lead to infection, Dr. Ciraldo says. Can’t help yourself? Put a bandage over the bug bite during the daytime to prevent yourself from scratching.

Lastly, don’t apply neomycin, polysporin, or other antibiotic ointments. “These often cause allergic reactions and actually make the bite worse instead of better,” Dr. Ciraldo says.

What home remedy stops bug bites from itching?

If the itching, in particular, is what’s driving you up the wall (been there), Dr. Song says the best dermatologist-approved bug bite solutions are natural anti-inflammatory ingredients. “Bug bites are inflammatory responses by the body and are best healed quickly with anti-inflammatory ingredients,” she explains. So anti-itch home remedies such as aloe vera, vinegar, garlic, peppermint oil, and mint can help speed the healing of a bug bite and calm the itch.

There is a caveat, though: “Beware that these ingredients applied to open wounds will cause irritation and stinging, so

it's important to make sure the bug bites are not scratched open prior to application," Dr. Song says.

Why are bug bites worse at night?

Serious question: Why does the bug bite itchiness seem to get *so* much worse when you're trying to relax and get ready for bed? "Our movement during the day increases blood flow to our skin, so by night time, the increased cutaneous blood flow creates heightened redness and itch," Dr. Ciraldo explains.

Also, cortisol, aka the stress hormone, tends to dip at night, which can take the itchiness up a notch. "Cortisol typically fights inflammation and decreases itch sensations," Dr. Song explains. "At night time, our body's cortisol level drops as we relax for bedtime, and the itch from the bug bites becomes less suppressed."

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