

# Bee Stings



## General Information and advice for beekeepers

When a honey bee stings someone, the sting, venom sac and venom pump are left in the skin after the bee pulls away. Most of the venom will be injected in the first 20 seconds but the pump can continue for up to two minutes. It is important to get the sting out fast to minimize the dose of Venom.

It is generally thought that a bee sting should not be squeezed for fear of forcing more venom into the skin, but experiments in America have shown that as long action is taken quickly there is no difference at all between scraping, tweaking or squeezing. Time can be wasted finding a penknife or scraper, so the best method is to **scratch out the sting with a fingernail or hive tool quickly**. Then smoke the area to mask the alarm pheromone in the sting to stop any more bees from stinging in the same Area.

If possible, close the hive gently, move away for a few minutes and apply a soothing lotion, such as Witch Hazel or calamine lotion onto the affected area. It is useful to keep a small bottle handy with your beekeeping tools. On returning home, an ice pack or packet of frozen peas will help to reduce any pain or swelling resulting from the sting.

Sometimes a bee will sting through the bee suit or gloves. Then it only takes a moment to shift the clothing and dislodge the sting, smoke the area and remove the sting from the clothing. Some beekeepers react very little to bee stings and carry on regardless but it is wiser to wear protective clothing and just take the gloves off for delicate work such as queen marking and clipping. This also has the advantage of keeping your hands clean and free from propolis. It is important to encourage beginners to wear full protective clothing while they gain confidence and find how they react to bee stings.

## ii) Unconscious person.

If the person becomes unconscious, loosen tight clothing and place him/her in the **recovery position** (see illustration) on his/her side.

- Tilt the head back for a good airway.
- Put underneath arm behind the back.
- Check that s/he is breathing.
- Check that he has a pulse in the side of the neck.
- If there is another person, send him to flag down the ambulance.
- Do not try to give the person stung any food or drink.
- If the person's heart stops or the breathing stops, resuscitation should be provided by a trained person.



**Remember Anaphylactic shock is very rare, but it does happen very quickly and calm procedure is essential.**

## Practical Suggestions

Post these instructions in your apiary shed in a prominent place. Include the address, post code of the apiary, grid reference and telephone number, if there is one. Also provide directions to the nearest phone.

- Write out this information about the apiary site on a card and put it in a 'plastic pocket' beside the instruction sheet. The telephoner can grab this card and take it to the nearest phone to inform the ambulance service.
- If possible, take a mobile phone to the apiary whenever working with bees so that help can be called in case of an emergency.

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Some beekeepers like to get stung a few times a year to keep up their immunity' to stings or to 'protect' themselves from rheumatism and arthritis. These points are debatable and must be the personal decision of the beekeeper concerned.

About 20% of beekeepers seem to have some allergic reaction to bee stings. This can range from slight swelling in the vicinity of the sting, to a generalized itching (urticaria) or anaphylaxis (generalized shock including difficulty in breathing). This very allergic group needs to be careful when working with bees to ensure that they are not stung or have prepared for an emergency. Unfortunately even beekeepers that normally show little reaction to bee stings may react adversely the next time they are stung so it is always wise to be prepared and ensure that help can be called in any emergency.

Bee stings can be avoided best by having gentle bees, choosing sensible times and weather to open the hives, by correct use of smoke and gentle handling. Frequent washing of bee suits and gloves will remove any residual sting pheromone and reduce the likelihood of subsequent bee stings. Remember, **if stung – get the sting out fast.**

## Treatment for Stings

If a beekeeper has a fairly severe reaction to stings with some degree of pain and swelling, he may choose to take medication before going to the apiary. Aspirin and anti-histamines are the tablets to consider here, but **nothing should be taken without consulting your own doctor first.** Only the GP can advise about the possible interaction with any other medication which is already being taken.

If a beekeeper is likely to have severe reactions to stings his doctor might have prescribed an Epi-pen adrenaline injection to carry, for an emergency. **Only the beekeeper or a trained colleague who has been given prior permission by the beekeeper may use this injection.**

## Bee sting shock

If a person is stung and shows some distress it is important to follow a few basic guidelines. Bee sting anaphylactic shock is rare and you may never see it, but if you know what to do you can react quickly and calmly to help.

## What to do

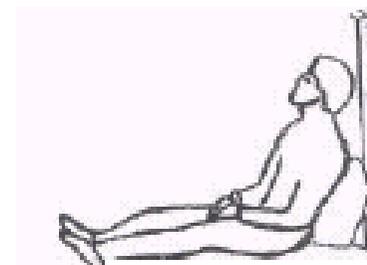
1. **Move the person away from the hives.**
2. **Scrape out the sting/s** as quickly as possible in order to stop any further injection of venom.
3. **Get the person to sit down and encourage him/her to remain calm.**
4. **If there are signs of difficult breathing, light headedness or general reaction to the sting:-**

- Ask the person if this is normal and if he has any medication provided by his GP (i.e. antihistamine tablets). If so let him medicate himself.
- Position the person (see below) and
- Simultaneously if possible, get someone to ring for an ambulance. **Give the address** of the house or apiary clearly and the grid reference if known and say it is **a bee sting reaction.** This will help to prepare the ambulance team.

## To position the person

### Conscious person.

- Loosen tight clothing at the waist and neck.
- Sit him/her on the ground, leaning against a wall, tree or the side of a car.
- Make the person as comfortable as possible to help breathing. (see illustration).
- The person may be short of breath, feeling sick or feeling faint and may be very frightened so stay with the person, talk quietly and encourage him/her to breathe in and out regularly.



Conscious Person