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## Dealing with summer bummers: bug bites, heat rash, ocean itch

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Scratching from bug bites or poison ivy? Feeling queasy after the office picnic? Welcome to summer: You hit the great outdoors, and sometimes it hits you right back. But don't let mosquitos or spoiled potato salad keep you inside. Just follow these brilliant ideas -- from Philip Hagen, M.D., assistant professor of medicine at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, and Erin M. Welch, M.D., assistant professor of dermatology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center -- and you'll be all set for the season.

Problem: Poison ivy

Solution: Lotion up

The itchy three-leaf plant grows as ground cover, shrubs, and vines throughout much of the United States. Before venturing into a potentially poison ivy-laden brush or wood, slick on a lotion such as Ivy Block, which creates a barrier between your skin and the plant's irritating oil. If you've got the telltale rash -- a streaky pattern that appears wherever the leaves brushed against your skin -- soak the area in Domeboro, an astringent that helps dry the blisters and soothe the inflammation. A 20-minute rinse with soapy water helps, too.

One more thing: You're contagious right after you've been exposed, so don't scratch and then touch someone else or share a towel. After rinsing well, you can't spread it.

Problem: Food poisoning

Solution: Hydrate early, often

If the succulent shrimp salad at the office outing sent you straight to the loo, sip a sports drink. It'll replace the electrolytes you're losing from vomiting and diarrhea. Until you feel better, avoid solid foods and drink clear juices, broths, water, and more sports drinks.

One more thing: Don't take antidiarrheal medicine. Experts say that it's healthier to let the diarrhea carry the toxins out of your system. [Health.com: Smart woman's summer survival guide](#)

Problem: Insect bites

Solution: Wear protection

Spray repellents with DEET or picaridin on exposed skin and clothes. For extra protection when you're in the woods, try Sawyer Premium Insect Repellent Clothing Treatment, a bug killer you can apply to clothing, tents, and other gear. Too late? Soothe itchy bites with a paste of 3 teaspoons baking soda and 1 teaspoon water, topical Benadryl, nonprescription hydrocortisone cream, or an oatmeal bath made with 1 cup oatmeal (put it in a tied-off pantyhose leg to rein in the mess) to a bath full of water.

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One more thing: Don't scratch; it can lead to infections. If you're tempted, keep your fingernails too short to do damage. Health.com: Beat the bugs

Problem: Ocean itch

Solution: Rinse with vinegar

An itchy, bumpy red rash around your swimsuit line that pops up a couple of days after ocean swimming is probably "sea bather's eruption" -- stings from tiny, larval jellyfish. Up to 15 percent of ocean swimmers may get this in the summer. To prevent the rash, remove your suit immediately after swimming and before you shower. Then rinse your body with a solution of ¼ cup white vinegar to 1½ cups water. If you get the rash anyway, apply the vinegar-and-water solution and use hydrocortisone cream two to three times a day to relieve the itch.

One more thing: Jellyfish larvae usually stick in your swimsuit. So don't shower with your suit on or let it dry while you're wearing it; both activate the jellyfish larvae's stingers.

Problem: Altitude sickness

Solution: Take it slow

Hiking or camping above an altitude of 9,000 feet can lead to nausea, headache, shortness of breath, and difficulty sleeping. To nix the sickness, it's best to acclimate yourself by spending a day (or two) first at 3,000 to 6,000 feet, then at 6,000 to 8,000 feet, and finally at 9,000 to 10,000 feet. There's no quick fix for short trips -- if you feel sick, it's time to go back down. Also, you should avoid caffeine and nicotine because they worsen the fluid loss and faster heartbeat that occur naturally as you go up in altitude.

One more thing: Planning to be at 10,000-plus feet for several days? Ask your doctor about the drug Diamox, which helps prevent altitude sickness. Health.com: How to stay safe in the sun

Problem: Heat rash

Solution: Hit the showers

You're dining alfresco -- and suddenly you feel like you're body's covered in needles? It could be heat rash, a condition also known as "prickly heat." The red bumps or tiny fluid-filled blisters pop up when sweat glands get plugged up under your clothing or in the folds of skin under your breasts or arms. The best cure is a cool shower; the rash should disappear in a couple of hours. You can try an antihistamine like Benadryl for the itch. But avoid greasy ointments, which will plug up the glands even more.

One more thing: Wear loose cotton clothing that helps keep you cool.

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