

## Night Bites

Have you ever awoken to find itchy bites on your body? You might have assumed that a mosquito found its way into your room, but you may have been visited by another, more treacherous pest.

Bed bugs are found around the world, and any home can be at risk of an infestation. When bed bugs come to visit, they'll settle in to a dark corner and reproduce until a colony can contain literally hundreds of these tiny bloodsuckers.

Many years ago, bed bugs were most prevalent among birds' nests. Over the years, however, bed bugs evolved and adapted to environmental changes. They eventually learned to leave the nest and settle in to the homes of much larger warm-blooded prey: humans.

Bed bugs are quite intelligent, as far as insects are concerned. They can be extremely smart in the way that they live and feed. Bed bugs suck the blood of their human hosts, and may also target animal prey including dogs, cats, birds and even bats.

When a bed bug finds a human home to live in, it will never be lacking for food. Bed bugs take their sumptuous meals by using their elongated beaks to pierce the hosts' skin. The feast begins, and the insects will feed on blood until they are literally engorged. While people and other animals may struggle to find food, a bed bug living in a human home will never run out of supplies.

### Bed Bugs and Disease

Doctors and medical experts have asserted that the bites of bed bugs do not present any particular danger of disease. Mosquito bites are far more threatening because they can sometimes transfer serious ailments such as malaria, dysentery, elephantiasis or h-fever.

A bed bug can be a host to a number of diseases, but they are seldom able to pass these conditions on to their hosts or victims. There is a greater risk of acquiring an infection from constantly and harshly scratching at the itchy, affected areas.

### How the Bed Bugs Bite

As mentioned, bed bugs use their beaks to pierce the skin and suck an abundant supply of blood. In doing so they will leave a small amount of saliva in the victim's skin. This saliva, fortunately, does not contain diseases or pathogens. They can, however, cause allergic reactions. Some people with sensitive skin will react harshly to these bites.

Most bed bug bites swell after 10 minutes to 24 hours. They swell and appear reddish, just like mosquito bites. There is usually discomfort and itchiness that accompanies the swelling. Remember when your mother told you "Scratching it will only make it worse"? Well, she was right. The itch from bed bug bites can be so persistent that victims keep on scratching, making the condition even more annoying. In the end, the aggravating bite marks will become actual wounds that are prone to infection.

### Avoid the Bite

Of course, the best and most effective way to prevent or avoid the bites of bed bugs is to be sure the insects will not appear after the sun goes down.

The first step to enjoying a bug-free sleep is to ensure that your bed, and your room as a whole, is not infested by bed bugs. Maintain hygiene and cleanliness to prevent bed bugs from settling in. Clean your room regularly and thoroughly, paying close attention to cleaning crevices and cracks in your floors and walls.

If you're a traveler, make sure the hotel you're staying in is not infested with bed bugs. If bed bugs are present in your hotel room, they will sneak into your luggage and begin a new infestation when you arrive at home.

When traveling, consider applying an insect repellent to your skin before you go to sleep. There are easy-to-use sprays and lotions that will make bed bugs reluctant to go near you. They'll view your skin as a danger zone, and will find you an unappealing source of food.

To recap, here are some facts to remember about bed bugs:

\* If you travel or share a home with others, it can be hard to avoid the reality of bed bugs.

\* Once a few of these insects have found their way into your home, they can quickly multiply until you're forced to deal with a full infestation.

\* Prevention is better than a cure. Keep your home clean and don't put yourself in the position of importing bed bugs by staying in hotels or using second hand furniture.

\* Use insect repellent on your skin when sleeping in a hotel room. This will send the bugs packing.

\* If you are bit by bed bugs, don't panic. These insects will not spread disease. Wash the area with soap and water, and treat it as you would a mosquito bite. In a few days, the bite marks will fade and heal themselves.

Bed bug bites are less dangerous than mosquito bites, but infinitely creepier. Should you fall victim to bed bugs in your home, your best course of action is to call a professional exterminator.