

INSECT BITES and FISH STINGS



Most people now realise that the poison in a bee sting is acidic and application of an alkali will soothe and relieve pain, after carefully removing the sting. Wasps and hornets have alkaline poisons, and acids such as vinegar or fresh-cut limes will help to relieve the pain.

Sandfly bites often have a delayed reaction and intense irritation occurs after forty-eight hours. As with other irritating bites from insects, the use of liquor picis carb fort. should be tried. This is a strong solution of coal tar and just a dab using a cotton bud will relieve the itch. Then dust over the sticky stuff with a little talcum powder.

Fish stings vary from that of the simple catfish (*Plotosi*), to the horrible stonefish (*Synanceja horrida*), lionfish i.e. Ikan Sembilan (*Pterois russelli*) or stingray (*Aetobatus marinari*). Their venom, which they concentrate from phytotoxins

in algae and plankton, would seem to be alkaline. This is also applicable to jellyfish in all their unpleasant varieties. Children should be warned off collecting those "cone-shaped shells" many of which are pretty but have a defensive poison-injecting mechanism.

Those who "muck about in boats", go sailing, wind-surfing or water-skiing should always have a bottle of vinegar or Heinz Salad Cream at hand for soothing jellyfish stings. Vinegar will also remove a clinging jelly. It is wise when visiting unexplored beaches and reefs to always wear a pair of thick-soled boots. One never knows what might lurk below the water surface.

Doctors will find it very useful and comforting to the patient when 5% xylocaine is injected into the wounds left by various poisonous fishes, even from stingrays. (It is wise to take a syringe and a bottle of the stuff to that beach party.) Stonefish stings are little relieved even with Pethidine or Morphine.

Since most of these alkaline venoms are susceptible to heat, then immersion in water as hot as bearable is preferable to iced water and ice cubes. The local traditional story of asking the oldest fisherman nearby to pass his usually strong and acidic urine onto the sting may be sensible – the same tradition exists along the English Channel coast where the Weaver Fish, with its similar sting, has its habitat. SMA

Erratum: In the April 2009 issue, the second last paragraph was printed as 'It is lastingly painful to inject into its tendinous part so one must aim well above into the circumflex humeral nerve which appears from round the back!'. It should have read 'It is lastingly painful to inject into its tendinous part so one must aim well above, and neither into the circumflex humeral nerve which appears from round the back!'