

# Resisting Chiggers

The best way to avoid chiggers is to stay on paths. Chiggers love grasses, and love to jump onto your leg or foot when you walk by. They work their way north to warm, moist places (waistband, bra line, armpits and worse...). By the time your chigger bites start itching, the chiggers themselves are long gone.

Experts recommend wearing long sleeves and tall boots, and stuffing your pants into your socks when venturing into chigger territory. Then, *shower* and *wash your clothes* (hot, soapy water for both) as soon as you can – don't wear that clothing again until they are washed. Some chiggers wander about for hours before finding a place to feed, so you often have time to wash them off. If it's too hot to dress defensively, stop every half hour or so and vigorously rub your skin, including those soft, tender spots that chiggers love (waistband and underarms). Chiggers brush off rather easily, but because they are too small to cause a tickle, it's important to rub yourself down before you start itching.

## Prevention

Spray yourself and/or your clothing, depending on what kind of spray you use.

You can use an insect repellent [containing DEET](#) on both skin and clothing. Apply **DEET** liberally to your shoes, socks, and pant legs. Treat your waist area and shirt if you'll be in tall vegetation. Carefully apply the repellent by hand to your face, neck, and ears; *you don't want DEET in your eyes or mouth!* Adults should apply DEET products to their children. You may need to reapply DEET products after several hours.

Apply **permethrin** to clothing, hiking boots, and your backpack. *Permethrin products should never be used on skin.* It remains effective on clothing through several washings. Permethrin is sold under the names Permanone and Duranon. Ex-Officio sells clothing that is pretreated with permethrin (lasts up to 70 washings).

Non-chemical alternative: using **Essential Oils**. If you use Essential Oils (EO) Therapy, Tea Tree Oil seems to work best against ticks, chiggers, and deer flies, while citronella, lemon, and eucalyptus are the best for fending off mosquitoes and black flies. Remember that you should not use full-strength EO directly on your skin; instead, they should be mixed with a carrier of some sort before being applied. You can add a few oil daubs to outer clothing (like around the tops of your shoes), but only where they will not come into contact with skin.

Try to only use one EO at a time, but if you're really intent on mixing scents, aim to keep them within the same scent family—lemon can work with lemongrass, but smells downright rank when blended with eucalyptus. You can blend the latter with lavender, but sparingly. Lavender can work well with peppermint or rosemary, but use clove or tea tree oils on their own.

*Make your own repellent spray (stronger stuff, better for adults)!*

What you'll need:

- Spray bottle (8oz or 10oz sizes work best)
- Water
- Witch hazel
- Vegetable glycerin
- Lemon, citronella, tea tree, rosemary, or eucalyptus essential oil

Create a 20:80 mix of water: witch hazel, add a teaspoon of vegetable glycerin, and 30 drops of essential oil. Hose yourself down with this stuff if you're in an insect-heavy area, and re-apply when the scent starts to fade. Feel free to do a blend of lemon and eucalyptus, or tea tree with rosemary; if you have a negative skin reaction, or if you really don't like the smell, discontinue use.

## About Chiggers

Chiggers, which are the [microscopic larvae of mites](#) in the *Trombicula* genus, feed on skin tissue. Like ticks, they're opportunistic parasites that grab onto any host that happens to wander by them. Unlike ticks, chiggers are rather bad at embedding themselves in your skin. They usually grab hold of a hair follicle or skin pore.

Chiggers aren't particularly good at penetrating skin, so they tend to prefer areas of the body where the skin is soft and supple. People most often find chigger bites on their ankles, behind the knees, along the waistline, or in their armpits.

Once the chigger has secured itself to a hair follicle, it pierces your skin and releases some saliva, which is loaded with digestive enzymes. The enzymes effectively liquefy your skin tissue, making it easier for the chigger to feed on your skin. A healthy human immune system will quickly detect the intruders, however, and take defensive action. A red, raised bump, called a papule, forms at the site of each chigger bite. The wall of this round welt is called a stylosome, and the chigger puts it to good use – he uses the stylosome like a drinking straw, through which it slurps up a smoothie of skin cells.

To get a good meal, chiggers need to feed for 3-4 days. Unfortunately for them, they rarely have the chance to hang around that long on a human host. The slightest touch will brush them off. If they haven't already been dislodged when you remove your clothing, they'll get washed down the drain the next time you shower. In fact, if you suspect you've strayed into chigger territory while outdoors, a *long, soapy shower* should do the trick to remove any that hitched a ride. Chiggers fare much better on hosts with fur, where they can get a good grip and feed at a leisurely pace.

People often believe that bright red spot in the center of the bite is the chigger itself. It isn't. That's the stylosome, and about 4-6 hours *after* the chigger bites you, it will start itching like mad. And those stylosomes will keep itching for 10-21 days, as your body battles the foreign substances injected by the chigger. Chiggers can't burrow, and they will be long gone by the time you're praying for relief from the tortuous itchiness

they've inflicted on you. You aren't suffocating anything by coating the bite in nail polish or Vaseline, and you aren't killing anything by applying alcohol or nail polish remover or any other chemical substance to the bite. The red, raised bump you're scratching is nothing more than your own skin trying to heal itself.

Chiggers don't transmit diseases, thankfully, but chigger bites can become infected, especially if you keep scratching them. The best thing you can do to heal chigger bites quickly is keep them clean. Wash your skin with soap and warm water, and try not to scratch them. If the itching is unbearable (uh, yeah!), apply a good anti-itch product or antihistamine cream.

### **Some remedies/suggestions from victims (not verified):**

- “I bought some stuff called Chiggerid, about \$4 for a small container. Then I realized it smelled similar to the muscle rub (Equate brand) that Wal-Mart sells. Twice as much solution, half the price. Same ingredients.”
- “Apple cider vinegar is GREAT for preventing chigger bites. Put vinegar in small spray bottle, and spray legs, arms. Reapply mid-day.”
- “After the itching started, we rubbed on Corn Huskers Lotion. We rubbed it in for at least a minute on all the bites. After about 10 minutes the itching pretty much went away.”
- “Apply ice pack or cold compress to the area to stop the itching.”
- “Use Arm and Hammer toothpaste, applying a small amount to each bite.
- Soak in baking soda and water; this neutralizes the Ph balance of the skin. Another effective bath can be made with cornstarch and you soak in it as with the baking soda, (this will effectively reduce the soreness). Epsom salt is another excellent option for making a bath for soaking to reduce swelling and itching.”
- “Use your spit since this too has the ability to neutralize the Ph balance of the skin, and of course, this is your own spit so you really have nothing to lose here. Just apply the saliva to the affected area and massage gently.”

*Let me know if you have some suggestions of your own! If you have suffered, you know this requires desperate measures.*