

## WHAT IS BITING ME? – DELUSIONS OF INSECTS

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Whether you work as a consultant, agronomist, landscaper or co-op, people ask questions about all kinds of things . We all have the sensation from time to time of something biting us. Sometimes you look down and see a critter sometimes there seems to be nothing there. What about when you wake up and find bites all over you and you wonder who did that? Have you ever had a person that believed they were infested with some type of bug or worm and were looking to you for help?

The first question is – are their visible bites? This is a starting point. In Wisconsin most of the things that bite will be active during the late spring to early fall. It is very difficult to diagnose the cause of the bite without looking at the history and circumstances surrounding the problem. Where has the person been in the last 48 hr? Where are the bites located and how long have they had them? Do they have pests?

The next step is to ask to see a sample of the possible creature. Some of the more common causes to look for include:

**Assassin bugs**- Normally feed on insects- gives painful bite if handled

**Bird mites** in summer- bites show up anywhere on body. Mites look like walking pepper grains- will find bird nest near windows, vents; most common in June.

**Chiggers** a mite that attacks insects, - oozing welts found where clothing is restricted- sock and belt line, etc- History of being outside in last 48 hrs. Bites take at least 12 hr. to show – mites already gone but body reacts. Bites can last for days.

**Fleas** from pets – group of bites often around ankles find small jumping insects.

**Fur mites** of pets- Blister like bites on forearms and body – pet often shows more of a dry skin symptom. May need to take pet to a veterinarian for confirmation

**Bed bugs** if you are traveling or purchased used furniture, Most bites on arms and body. Not all people react- Look like big mosquito bites. Spots on sheets

**Black Flies**- small gnat that bites around neck and hair line- bites often bleed and swell up but you do not feel them at first- mostly in late May and June when work outdoors.

**Straw itch mite** – Bites or blisters all over body. History of working around grain, feed or hay that is infested with grain beetles or moths- These mites are parasites of the grain insects.

**Scabies** – “human mange”- Can only be diagnosed with a skin scraping- more of a rash – do not feel bites. Need to come into close contact with infested person.

**Spider bites**- most of what people call spider bites are not- single bite with bruising- in rare cases an open sore- - can be misdiagnosed bacterial infection ( MRSA)

What about you feel like you are getting bite but no creatures can be found?

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If there are visible reactions it could be allergies, medication reactions, symptoms of underlying medical issues, irritation from fiberglass or other fibers or even a reaction to a new soap or body cream. You need to be a detective and look at possibilities other than insects or mites.

At times people will have imaginary problems. This is given the medial diagnosis of delusions of parasitosis – It is a persistent unshakable belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence. People are convinced there are insects or worms on or inside them that are biting them , but no insects can be found and the stories often do not make biological sense or match any of the know problems

The “classic case” is a person who has been infested for weeks or months. They cannot find real insects but often will bring in samples with numerous pieces of lint, fibers and hair. They believe creatures are living inside them and are concerned they are contagious. Often there has been recent major stress in their lives and believe they became infested from some object or animal. If it is a medical problem it must be dealt with by a health professional. We can help by eliminating insects or mites as the source. Do not assume that the person does not have real symptoms. It is important to separate the sensation of being bitten vs. finding a real bite. If you need help with samples or want to talk about the case send it to the Insect Diagnostic Lab. – 1630 Linden Dr., Madison Wisconsin – 53706. Support the person–do not doubt they have the sensations–but suggest they look in other directions other than an insect or mite cause.

Unfortunately there is information on the internet that will support the delusions. One of the more common ones is Morgellons disease or syndrome. People submit samples with fibers and lint that they are sure are infesting their skin. There are web sites that support this “scientifically undiscovered “problem. No credible medical or public health association has verified the existence or diagnosis of Morgellons disease. There are physicians who are both dermatologist/psychiatrist that specialize in helping people find a cause for their sensations or skin problems. The bottom line is these are medical issues that should be handled by medical people. We never recommend spraying homes or using pesticides on people without knowing what the problem is.