

Ah, spring is in the air. The flowers are blooming and the air is warming. The sights and sounds and smells of this great time of year are all around and one of those sounds is buzzing. Apparently, Woody is quite attracted to that buzzing sound, and that attraction proved to be a bit of a problem.

As I suspect you have surmised, the buzzing sound to which I refer is being caused by bees. In the spring, when the flowers are in bloom, bees abound, taking nourishment from the flowers to support their hives. There seems to be a certain curiosity or attraction to said bees by many of our canine companions and, as has been the case for Woody, this can lead to problems. I am not sure exactly why some dogs are attracted to bees, perhaps it is the buzzing sound that might create a frequency of sound that either appeals to or aggravates a particular dog. Maybe it is a visual effect. Whatever the case may be, the results of this encounter can be, at the very least uncomfortable and at worst, life threatening.

A bee sting carries with it venom that causes some pain at the sting site as well as an inflammatory reaction from the body of the victim. It is this inflammatory reaction that can lead to more severe problems. In Woody's case, he apparently attacked a bee somewhere in his backyard and the cascade of inflammation began. This inflammation is spear headed by the release of histamine from inflammatory cells setting off the cascade of events, which caused Woody's face to swell up like a balloon, according to his caretaker, predominately on the left side. The swelling got to the point where his left eyelids were swollen shut and his right lids were close to being the same. That is the point when Woody presented for examination.

Upon examination, Woody was in good spirits despite his swollen face and decreased vision. Owing to his happy spirit, Woody did not show signs of pain though looking at him made me feel like he must be extremely uncomfortable. A bee stinger was found and removed from his left upper lip inside his mouth.

The type of reaction Woody was enduring falls into the allergic category, which implies a hyper response from the immune system. The goal in muting this response is to reduce the excessive immune response and thus the inflammatory reaction associated with it, that and get the stinger out if you can find it, as it keeps pumping in venom after it dislodges from the bee. As I mentioned, histamine is the chemical most responsible for this hyper reaction to a bee sting, so it follows that the use of antihistamines would be warranted. Antihistamine drug is injected along with corticosteroids which, in combination, will decrease the inflammation and thus bring Woody's face down to normal size over a few hours. Indeed, that is what happened in Woody's case.

Allergic reactions to bee stings are variable and in some cases in dogs, and humans for that matter, there is no allergic reaction to the bee sting. The variability in allergic response is what leads to variability in severity of the inflammatory response. There is a direct correlation. It is also important to understand that oftentimes, the allergic responses can escalate in intensity with each successive exposure. In other words, it gets worse each time a bee sting occurs. This is why it can be a life threatening event in the case of some dogs. If Woody, for example, had a more severe response to his bee sting, the inflammation may have been severe enough to close down his airway and disallow breathing, a situation that is not compatible with life.

Try to keep your dogs from playing with bees, and if a sting does occur, make sure to monitor them closely for swelling, especially in the area of the head. If this does occur, seek immediate veterinary attention for your companion.