

# MANAGING YOUR CELLULITIS

Staphylococcus



Streptococcus



Cellulitis is an infection in the skin and soft tissues under the skin. It is caused by bacteria called staphylococcus (staph) and streptococcus (strep).



Bacteria enter through a break in the skin, such as a cut, burn, or insect bite. Symptoms include sudden redness and swelling in the skin and a rash.



You might also have a fever, chills, sweating, headache, or weakness.



Your health care provider will examine you and do blood tests to make a diagnosis.



## What Is Cellulitis?

Cellulitis is an infection in the skin and soft tissue layers under the skin. People with diabetes, blood circulation problems, and weakened immune systems can easily develop cellulitis. Also, people who had recent medical procedures, such as heart or lung surgery, can get cellulitis, as can people who work on farms or in gardens or who handle fish.

## What Causes Cellulitis?

Cellulitis is caused by bacteria, usually kinds of bacteria called staphylococcus (staph) and streptococcus (strep). Bacteria enter through a break in the skin, such as a cut, burn, insect bite, open sore, or crack (for example, between toes).

## What Are the Symptoms of Cellulitis?

Symptoms include sudden redness, swelling, and tenderness in the skin and a rash. Sometimes a red line extends toward the closest lymph nodes (glands). Other signs of infection include fever, chills or sweating, headache, rapid heartbeat, and weakness.

Most often cellulitis affects lower legs and feet, but it can also occur on the face (especially cheeks), hands, or scalp, and in children, around the rectum. Cellulitis can also occur as an eye infection, with swollen eyelids, loss of sight, and problems with eye movement.

## How Is Cellulitis Diagnosed?

The health care provider will examine the area and do blood tests. Sometimes, a tiny sample of skin (biopsy) may also be taken when the diagnosis is unclear.



Your health care provider will give you medicine to fight the infection and stop the pain.



Put up (elevate) your leg if it has cellulitis, but don't keep it completely immobile. Occasionally wiggle your toes and flex your ankle/leg to lower your risk of getting blood clots.

Call your health care provider immediately if you have a high fever.



Ask your health care provider if you have any questions.

## How Is Cellulitis Treated?

Medicine (antibiotics) will fight the infection and relieve pain. People with mild infections can take medicine by mouth and don't need to be hospitalized. People with cellulitis that is hard to treat are sometimes hospitalized and given intravenous antibiotics. In most people, the infection clears up in 7 to 10 days. People with diabetes or other medical problems may have a longer recovery.

## DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Cellulitis:

- ✓ **DO** take medicine for as long as your health care provider tells you, even if you feel better, unless your health care provider says you can stop.
- ✓ **DO** elevate your leg if it has cellulitis, but wiggle your toes or flex your ankle frequently to prevent blood clots.
- ✓ **DO** apply cool, wet cloth dressings.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider at once if the infection spreads or you develop high fevers, vomiting, headache, or red streaks that don't go away.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider at once if you notice areas of infection starting nearby, your skin becomes dark or discolored, or blisters appear.
- ✓ **DO** avoid injuring your skin by wearing protective clothing or equipment.
- ✓ **DO** clean a cut or injury and use an antibiotic ointment. If it seems to be infected (red or warm), call your health care provider.
- ⊗ **DON'T** skip doses or stop taking antibiotics until finished.
- ⊗ **DON'T** resume normal activities until swelling and pain stop.
- ⊗ **DON'T** swim if you have a skin wound.

### FROM THE DESK OF

### NOTES

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following sources:

• American Academy of Dermatology

Tel: (888) 462-3376

Website: <http://www.aad.org>

• National Health Info Center

Tel: (800) 336-4797

Website: <http://www.health.gov/nhic/>