

# Learning About Cellulitis

When you get a cut or a scrape or there's some other break in your skin, you may not think much about it.

You might not even notice it.

But sometimes that damage can lead to a skin infection called cellulitis.

Think of your skin like a barrier.

It stops dirt and germs from getting into your body.

But when there's a break in that barrier—from things like a cut, scrape, bite, or puncture—bacteria can enter the skin and cause an infection.

Anyone can get cellulitis.

But there are things that can make a person more at risk of getting it.

This includes having diabetes, a weakened immune system, long-term swelling of the limbs, obesity, or skin conditions like eczema or psoriasis.

When you have cellulitis, your skin may be painful, warm, reddish, or swollen.

There may be pus or clear fluid coming from the area.

And you may have a fever or chills.

Cellulitis is treated with antibiotics.

This is usually done at home.

But if the infection is more serious, it may need to be treated in a hospital.

If you've been diagnosed with cellulitis, there are things that you can do to help your body heal.

The most important thing is to take your antibiotics as prescribed.

Don't stop taking the antibiotics just because you feel better.

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You need to take the full course.

If you can, prop up the area when you sit or lie down.

This helps reduce pain and swelling.

Keep the area clean.

If you have a wound, follow your doctor's wound care instructions.

If you didn't get instructions, follow this general advice.

Wash the wound with clean water two times a day.

But don't use hydrogen peroxide or alcohol.

These can slow healing.

Cover the wound with a thin layer of petroleum jelly and a nonstick bandage.

And change the bandage as often as needed.

If needed, ask your doctor if you can take over-the-counter pain medicine.

Most of the time, cellulitis is mild and gets better with treatment.

But it can lead to more serious infections, so it's important to know when to call your doctor.

Call right away or get immediate medical care if you have new or worse pain, swelling, warmth, or redness near the area.

Or you have new or worse red streaks leading from the area.

Or new or worse pus draining from the area.

Or you have a new or worse fever or chills.

And call right away or get immediate medical care if you have new or worse cellulitis symptoms that affect a joint, your hands, or the skin near your eyes or groin.

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You know yourself best.

Call your doctor if you have problems with your medicine or you're not getting better as expected.

There are things you can do to avoid getting cellulitis again, like taking good care of your skin.

Keep it clean and moisturized.

Protect your skin from injuries.

Check your skin often.

And care for any skin problems right away.

Remember to wash your hands often.

This can help prevent infections.

Work with your doctor to manage any long-term skin conditions, like eczema, psoriasis, and athlete's foot.

And ask your doctor if there are other things you can do to prevent cellulitis.

This may include taking antibiotics or other medicines, wearing compression stockings or sleeves, and staying at a weight that's healthy for you.

It may seem like a lot to know and do, but all these things help protect your skin and keep it healthy.

And remember, if you have any questions, you can always call your doctor.