



CELLULITIS

Patient Information



What is Cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a non-contagious inflammation of the skin and the tissue under the skin, resulting from a bacterial infection. Although cellulitis most commonly occurs on the face and lower legs, any area on the body may be affected.

What causes Cellulitis?

The skin is usually a good barrier against infection. However, a break in the skin from a cut, skin ulcer, injection, athlete's foot, badly scratched eczema, etc, is a way in which bacteria (germs) can get into and under the skin. A tiny cut is all that is needed to allow bacteria in, however sometimes the infection occurs for no apparent reason with no break in the skin found. A variety of bacteria can cause cellulitis.

What are the symptoms of Cellulitis?

Cellulitis can affect a small area to a large area of skin. Therefore, cellulitis can range from mild to serious.

Cellulitis starts off very small and may grow fast in the first day. Signs and symptoms include the following:

- Localized skin redness and inflammation that increases in size as the infection spreads.
- Tight, glossy, "stretched" appearance of the skin.
- Pain or tenderness of the area.

- Warmth over the area of redness.
- Sudden onset with rapid growth within the first 24 hours.
- Fever (may be accompanied by chills and sweats).
- A general ill feeling or feeling of malaise.
- Swelling in the lymph glands nearest the infection.

What are risk factors for Cellulitis?

- A suppressed immune system due to illness or from taking medication such as cortisone drugs.
- Chronic illness such as diabetes or peripheral vascular disease.
- Any injury that breaks the skin, or makes the skin sore including a surgical wound, insect bites or stings, animal or human bites, burns or skin lesions such as ulcers, athlete's foot, psoriasis, etc. This can even include simple injuries such as banging your elbow.
- Use of intravenous drugs.

How is Cellulitis treated?

Cellulitis is treated with antibiotics, which are prescribed to fight the infection. Symptoms often get worse before they get better so there may be an initial increase in redness when treatment is started before it starts to fade. Tell a doctor if the area of infection continues to spread or you become worse after you start antibiotics. (Some bacteria are

resistant to some antibiotics, so a change in or addition of an antibiotic may be needed if the infection does not improve with the first antibiotic). It is important to finish all of the antibiotics as prescribed, even if your symptoms disappear quickly. If untreated, cellulitis can be life threatening.

Other things that may help include:

- Painkillers such as ibuprofen can ease pain and reduce a fever.
- If you have a cellulitis of the leg, when you are resting, keep the leg raised. This helps to prevent excess swelling which may also ease pain. 'Raised' means that your foot is higher than your hip so gravity helps to reduce the swelling.
- If the cellulitis is in the forearm or hand, a high sling can help to raise the affected area to reduce swelling and pain.
- Take care of your skin, keeping it clean, soft and dry.

Prevention of Cellulitis

Maintain good general health and control chronic medical conditions. A body that is healthy can more easily fight infection, while a body that is run down has less protection against infection.