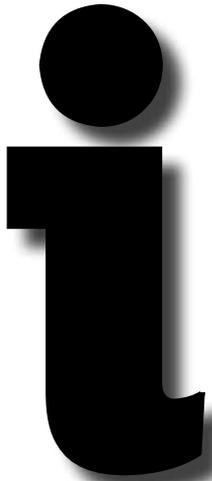


Cellulitis (1 of 2)



If you need your information in another language or medium (audio, large print, etc) please contact Customer Care on 0800 374 208 or send an email to: customer-care@salisbury.nhs.uk

You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Cellulitis is a common infection of the skin and the tissues just below the skin surface. Any area of the skin can be affected but the leg is the most common site.

What causes cellulitis?

Various bacteria (germs) can cause cellulitis. Sometimes the infection occurs for no apparent reason. The skin is usually a good barrier against infection, however, a break in the skin from a cut, ulcer, athlete's foot or badly scratched eczema is commonly the origin of the infection. This break allows bacteria to get under the skin and multiply to cause infection.

Who is at risk?

People who are at risk of getting cellulitis include those with damage to the skin, or other medical problems such as:

- diabetes
- circulatory problems such as poor blood flow to the limbs or varicose veins
- swollen legs or arms due to a blockage of lymph (lymphoedema)
- skin problems such as eczema or psoriasis, or an insect bite
- poor immune system - for example, if you take steroids or chemotherapy.

What are the symptoms?

Cellulitis causes an area of skin to suddenly become:

- red
- hot
- painful
- tender
- swollen

In more severe cases, cellulitis can also be accompanied – and often preceded – by:

- a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100.4°F) or above
- nausea and vomiting
- swollen
- vigorous shaking (rigors)
- dizziness
- confusion

These are signs that the infection has spread deeper into the body.

Treatment

Antibiotics may be injected directly into a vein if the infection is severe. Antibiotic tablets are often given once the infection is under control.

If you are given antibiotics to take when you go home it is very important to finish the course of tablets even though you may think that the infection has completely cleared up.

Self-care

- take paracetamol or ibuprofen if the cellulitis causes you pain or you have a temperature (please follow the instructions given on the packet).
- make sure that you drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.
- if the cellulitis is on the leg - to help prevent swelling and reduce any pain, rest your leg up above the level of your hip when you are sitting down.

Prevention

- wash your hands regularly, particularly when treating or touching a wound or skin condition
- make sure any cuts, grazes or bites are kept clean - wash them under running tap water and cover them with a plaster or dressing. Check to make sure that the injury is getting better over the next few days.
- keeping your skin moisturised will help to prevent dry, cracked skin.
- if you have diabetes you should have your feet checked by a trained person at least once a year (such as practice nurse, registered chiropodist or podiatrist).
- if you notice pain or discomfort in an area of the skin, check to see what it looks like. If it appears inflamed (red) and seems to get worse from one day to the next you will most likely need treatment and you should see your GP.
- be careful to avoid injuring your skin, especially if you have swollen limbs from a circulation problem.
- wear sturdy, well-fitting shoes or slippers with loose-fitting cotton socks to avoid injuring your feet.

When to seek medical advice?

See your GP or visit your nearest minor injuries unit as soon as possible if an area of your skin suddenly turns red, painful and hot.

Early treatment can help reduce the risk of the infection becoming severe.

Call 999 for an ambulance or go to your nearest emergency department immediately if:

- your face or the area around your eye is affected
- your symptoms are getting rapidly worse
- you experience other symptoms in addition to the changes in your skin, such as a fever or vomiting
- you have a weak immune system – for example, because of HIV or chemotherapy – or severe lymphoedema, a condition that causes swelling in the body's tissues
- a young child or elderly person has possible cellulitis.