



Cellulitis

MU Patient Education Series

Definition:

Cellulitis is a common bacterial skin infection. The condition causes swollen, red areas on your skin that may also feel warm or sore. If left uncared for, these sores can spread quickly, escalating to a severe infection.

CAUSES:

Cellulitis occurs when bacteria enters through cuts or breaks in your skin, most commonly in the lower legs. Cellulitis can also occur without having a break in the skin and is most common with older adults and people with a weak immune system.

WHO IS AT HIGH RISK FOR CELLULITIS?

Certain factors can make individuals more prone to cellulitis. Some of these factors include:

- Cracks or dry skin between the toes
- Cuts, fractures, burns or scrapes on your skin
- Obesity
- Weakened immune system
- Skin ulcers
- Insect bites or stings
- Surgical wounds
- Skin problems such as eczema or psoriasis
- Liposuction
- Fluid buildup in the legs and arms

SIGNS/SYMPTOMS:

In addition to red, tender sores on your skin, cellulitis may also cause:

- Fever



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- Pain on the infected area
- Warm skin
- Inflammation
- Swollen glands

If the sores are left untreated and an infection develops, the following symptoms may occur. These symptoms are much more serious. If you display any of these signs of an infection, contact your healthcare provider immediately.

- Chills
- Shaking
- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Overall sense of pain and discomfort
- Sweating
- Warm skin
- Exhaustion
- If the infected area is getting redder, more painful, or larger, or if it has red streaks extending from it.

TREATMENT/CARE:

Cellulitis is most often treated with oral antibiotics to kill the bacteria. You need to take the full course of antibiotics. Pain killers also may be prescribed. If your symptoms do not subside after a few days, contact your physician.

PREVENTION:

There are several ways to prevent cellulitis and protect your open wounds. Some of these methods include:

- Washing your wound daily with soap and water
- Keeping your skin moist with lotions to prevent dry, cracked skin
- Trimming your nails
- Wearing the proper shoes
- Avoiding injury
- Watching for infection
- Inspecting your skin
- Doing good personal hygiene



CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF:

If managed promptly and correctly, cellulitis can be treated successfully. If allowed to become severe, cellulitis-induced infections can be very serious, even life-threatening. If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms in addition to cellulitis sores, call your physician as soon as possible.

- Persistent fever
- Exhaustion
- Blistering over your sores
- Chills
- Aching
- Red streaks that spread

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