

## DESCRIPTION

An inflammation of the skin and the tissues just below the skin (subcutaneous). Cellulitis is most likely to occur on the face, arms, legs, and anal area. It can affect all age groups, including children.

## FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Tenderness, warmth, swelling, and redness in an area of the skin. A thin red line may extend from the area toward the heart. Fluid or pus may leak out.
- Fever, chills, sweating, and a general ill feeling.
- Lymph glands nearest the area may be swollen.

## CAUSES

Infection with bacteria, or, rarely, a fungal infection. It can begin with a minor injury to the skin that is invaded by the bacteria. The infection leads to inflammation, which is the body's response to infection. Your infection may be caused by a bacteria referred to as "MRSA"

## RISK INCREASES WITH

- Chronic illness, such as diabetes.
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs.
- Any injury that breaks the skin.
- Use of drugs by injection.
- Burns.
- Surgical wound infection.
- Skin disorders (eczema or psoriasis) or infections that cause skin symptoms, such as chickenpox.
- Poor blood circulation.

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Keep the skin clean.
- Avoid skin damage. Use protective clothing or proper gear for work or sports where injuries may occur.
- Wear shoes that fit well. Avoid going barefoot in areas where there may be risk of injury.
- If the skin is injured, wash the area with soap and water. Check the injured skin for the next few days to make sure it is healing. If not, seek medical care.
- Avoid swimming if you have any sores on your skin.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

With treatment, symptoms will begin to improve in 2 to 3 days, and complete recovery occurs in 7 to 10 days. Complications are rare, but may develop in those with chronic disease or weak immune systems.

## POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Spread of infection, if bacteria enter the bloodstream.
- Brain infection, if the condition occurs on the central part of the face.
- Infection of the bone, muscle, and tissue beneath the affected areas.
- Vein or lymph gland inflammation.

## ABCESS

A skin abscess is a collection of pus under the skin that is surrounded by inflamed tissue. The goal of abscess care is to effectively treat the infection.

- Warm soaks and compresses should be applied 3-4 times a day.
- Elevate the infected site whenever possible.
- Antibiotics are often used in the treatment of skin abscesses.
- Sometimes the site must be surgically drained. Packing is often used to keep the wound open to insure proper drainage.

## **GENERAL MEASURES**

- Your health care provider can usually diagnose the disorder by a physical exam of the affected area. Medical tests may include blood tests and study of a sample of fluid removed from the affected skin.
- Treatment is with drugs for the infection, rest, and hospital care, if needed.
- Warm soaks 3-4 times daily. This may also reduce pain and swelling.
- Elevate the affected area. Rest the arm or leg on a pillow. Don't move that area of your body unless you have to. This can help reduce swelling.
- If too much fluid is lost from the skin, you may need hospital care. Fluids will be given intravenously (IV).

## **MEDICATIONS**

- Antibiotics will be prescribed for infection. They may be taken by mouth or given as an injection.

Your doctor also recommends the following over-the-counter medications. These medications may offer significant symptom relief:

- For fever or pain use acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

(Acetaminophen and ibuprofen may also be alternated every 3 hours for persistent fever or pain.)

- Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your antibiotic prescription, even if you start to feel better.
- Antibiotics may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Use an alternative method of contraception for the remainder of the month after finishing your antibiotic steroid prescription.

## **ACTIVITY**

Get extra rest until symptoms improve. Then return to your normal level of activity.

## **SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF**

The following occur during treatment:

- Increasing or continued fever after 2-3 days of antibiotic treatment.
- Pain, redness, or swelling increases.
- Red streaks continue to extend, despite treatment.
- Vomiting.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop.