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Aneurin Bevan
University Health Board

Cellulitis Advice

What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is an infection of the skin and the tissues just below the skin surface. It can be serious if not treated promptly. The infection can spread through the body and can be life threatening. Most cases are successfully treated with antibiotics at home.

What causes cellulitis?

The skin is a good barrier against infection. However, a break in the skin (like a cut, skin ulcer, injection, athlete's foot or scratch) is a way in which bacteria (germs) can get into and under the skin and cause an infection. Sometimes the infection occurs for no apparent reason with no break in the skin found.

Who gets cellulitis?

Cellulitis can affect anyone. However, there are some things that can make you more prone to cellulitis: if you have athlete's foot, had an insect bite, skin cuts, have swollen legs (for various reasons), poorly controlled diabetes, have skin problems such as eczema, a poor immune system (for example, if you take steroids or chemotherapy) or are an intravenous drug user. You can reduce the chances of getting cellulitis by keeping your skin clean and well moisturised, cleaning any cuts or wounds, preventing cuts and scrapes by wearing appropriate clothing, footwear and gloves if working outside.

Is cellulitis serious?

Cellulitis can range from mild - involving a small area of skin - to serious where it is a spreading infection affecting a large area of skin and can cause septicaemia (blood poisoning) which can be life-threatening. It can also cause an abscess (collection of pus) under the skin and deeper infections involving the muscles and bones. In particular - cellulitis around the eye (periorbital cellulitis) needs urgent treatment. Severe cellulitis may make you very unwell, and you may need intravenous antibiotics - where the antibiotic is injected into a vein, but early treatment can prevent this.

What are the symptoms of cellulitis?

Cellulitis makes your skin painful, hot and swollen. The area usually looks red, but this may be less obvious on brown or black skin. Any area of the skin can be affected but the leg is the most common site.

What is the treatment for cellulitis?

You will have been prescribed a course of antibiotic tablets and the clinician who saw you will usually arrange for you to be seen again in a few days. Your symptoms might get worse in the first 48 hours of treatment but should then start to improve. In some cases, people find that antibiotics may make them feel sick (or be sick) and have diarrhoea. If this happens, don't stop taking the tablets but see your GP. It's important to keep taking antibiotics until they're finished even when you feel better and most people make a full recovery after 7 to 10 days.

Things you should do:	Things you shouldn't do:
<p>Keep the affected limb elevated (raised) as much as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For your leg keep your foot higher than your bottom to help reduce the swelling• To help with circulation, you should go for short walks every now and then, wiggle your toes and ankles regularly when your foot is raised• Put something under your mattress or the end of the bed so that your foot is raised at night.• For your forearm or hand use the high arm sling you have been given or, when sitting down, keep your arm on a cushion with your hand resting on your opposite shoulder. Move your wrist/elbow regularly to stop them getting stiff• Drink plenty of fluids to help prevent dehydration.• Clean any cuts or wounds that you may have - wash them under running tap water. You can also cover the cut or wound with a plaster, but make sure that you change the plaster regularly (particularly if it becomes wet or dirty).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sit with your legs crossed- this can restrict the blood flow to the legs and delay healing.• Avoid scratching your skin if possible. Conditions such as eczema can make skin very itchy, so use a moisturiser or medication that your GP has given you• Don't let your skin become too dry as this can crack easily, and bacteria may get in. Use moisturiser regularly on your skin.• Don't wear compression stockings until you're better

What should I take for Pain?

Painkillers, such as **Paracetamol**, are useful to ease pain, but it is best to take them regularly for a few days or so rather than every now and then. They can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Make sure you don't take any other product containing Paracetamol. **With all medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully**

Anti-inflammatory painkillers (like Ibuprofen) can also be used. These relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling, however if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant you shouldn't use them. Side effects sometimes occur with anti-inflammatory painkillers - stomach pain and bleeding from the stomach, are the most serious. Some people with asthma, high blood pressure, kidney failure or heart failure may not be able to take them either.

If you are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 5 days, we advise you to contact your GP or attend the Emergency Department at the Grange University Hospital (Not Minor injury unit)

Reference: Cellulitis - NHS

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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg**