

CELLULITIS

(Erysipelas)

NOLENSVILLE FAMILY MEDICINE

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BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An inflammation of the skin and the tissues just below the skin (subcutaneous). Cellulitis is most likely to occur on the face, arms, lower 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. Cellulitis cannot be passed from one person to another.

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

- Blood poisoning, 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.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

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.
- Soak the area in warm water to help it heal. 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. Replacement fluids will be given through a tube into a vein under the skin.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics will be prescribed for infection. They may be taken by mouth or injection. Complete the entire dose prescribed, even if symptoms disappear quickly.
- Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen for minor pain and fever.

ACTIVITY

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

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of cellulitis.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - High fever and chills.
 - Pain, redness, or swelling increases.
 - Red streaks continue to extend, despite treatment.
 - Vomiting.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page