

Lifetime Medical Associates

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What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is an infection within the skin that tends to spread. It is caused by germs called bacteria. Bacteria enter through a break in the skin. This may be a cut, burn, insect bite, an open sore or a crack, for example, between the fingers. People with diabetes mellitus, circulatory problems and weakened immune systems are more likely to develop cellulitis, as are those who have recently had some medical procedures, such as heart or lung surgery.

What are the symptoms of cellulitis?

Cellulitis appears suddenly. The skin becomes red, hot and painful. Suddenly, a rash may occur. There may be general signs of infection such as fever, chills or sweating, headache, fast heart rate and weakness.

Cellulitis can also be located in the eye. Ocular symptoms consist of inflamed eyelids, loss of vision and limitation of ocular motility.

Cellulitis is more frequent in the legs and feet. It can also appear in the face (especially in the cheeks), hands or scalp. In children, it can occur around the rectum.

What tests are needed?

Your doctor will examine the area and will measure your temperature and blood pressure. You may need blood tests. Blood samples are sent to a lab for analysis. He or she may sometimes also use imaging to obtain images of the soft tissue and muscle beneath the skin's surface.

What treatment is needed?

Your doctor will give you drugs to fight infection and relieve pain. If the infection is mild, you will not have to be hospitalized. Cellulitis can be difficult to treat, so sometimes it requires hospitalization and intravenous medication. If your case is mild, your doctor can give medication by mouth.

Do

- Take your medication for as long as directed by your doctor and continue with it even if you feel better, unless your doctor tells you to stop
- Elevate your legs if you have cellulitis on them, but do not let them be completely immobile; move your fingers or flex the ankle from time to time
- Use hot compresses (warm washcloth)
- Tell your doctor immediately if the infection spreads or if there is fever greater than 101 F

- Tell your doctor immediately if you notice the infection spreading, if the skin is dark or discolored, or if blisters occur

Recovery Time

In most people, the infection goes away after 7-10 days. It may take longer if you have diabetes or a problem that contributes to cellulitis.

What can be done to stop it from happening again?

Avoid skin damage by using protective clothing or equipment when you work or play sports. If you cut or damage the skin, clean and apply antibiotic ointment. Notify your physician if you see signs of infection (redness or warmth to touch).

Further information:

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