

Lower Limb Cellulitis

What happens when Cellulitis spreads?

This can be very serious when it spreads to other parts of the body such as the deeper layers of the skin, muscle and bone.

What are the signs of this?

- High temperature (above 38c or 104f)
- Fast heartbeat or breathing
- Feeling sick, dizzy or faint
- Diarrhoea
- Confusion or disorientation
- Cold, clammy pale skin
- Unresponsiveness or loss of consciousness.

**DIAL 999 OR GO TO
Accident & Emergency
immediately if you have signs
of spreading infection
(see above list).**

Who can I contact for help?

Contact your health care professional for further advice. This may be your GP, Practice Nurse or District Nurse.

Contact NHS 24 on 111

How long does Cellulitis last?

- Mild Cellulitis treated quickly should clear after 7 days of antibiotic treatment if you are otherwise healthy
- If you are elderly or if the infection was not treated quickly you may need 2 weeks of antibiotics
- Severe Cellulitis may need antibiotics through a drip and treatment in hospital
- You should see your GP if the infection continues to spread or you become worse after you start taking the antibiotics. Don't delay seeking further advice (**see section on when Cellulitis spreads**)
- Cellulitis is **not** contagious.

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Patient Information Leaflet

Lower Limb Cellulitis

What is Cellulitis?

Cellulitis is an infection of the skin and the tissues just below the surface of the skin. Any area of the skin can be affected but the leg is the most common site. Infection can develop suddenly and spread through the body quickly.

- Have poor circulation (Peripheral Arterial Disease)
- Poorly controlled diabetes
- Are an intravenous drug user
- Skin problems - eg, severe eczema, athlete's foot or cracked heels
- Skin scratches/cuts.

What causes Cellulitis?

The skin is a good barrier against infection. A break in the skin from a cut, skin ulcer, athlete's foot, scratch, etc, is a way in which bacteria (germs) can get into and under the skin. A tiny cut is all that is needed to allow bacteria in.

Who gets Cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a common problem and can affect anyone. There are some things that make you prone to Cellulitis:

- Are elderly
- Swollen legs, or are overweight or obese
- Had a previous episode of Cellulitis
- Have a weakened immune system, eg, take steroids or are having chemotherapy

What does Cellulitis look like?



What can I do to help?

- Follow healthcare professional providers medical treatment (antibiotics) and nursing recommendations (dressings and compression therapy if needed)
- Elevate the affected limb to help to prevent excess swelling
- The ankle should be higher than the hip for elevation to be effective
- Painkillers may help (take advice from your pharmacist if required)
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration
- If you have athlete's foot, treat it
- Moisturise the skin with a simple moisturiser to prevent the skin becoming dry and damaged.

How do I prevent Cellulitis happening again?

- Elevate swollen legs to prevent infection
- Regularly check between toes for athlete's foot and treat if present
- Keep cuts and abrasions clean
- Avoid scratching your skin
- Keep skin moisturised to avoid cracked skin (especially cracked heels).