

Cellulitis - Explaining cellulitis and how it is treated

What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a common infection of the skin and soft tissues underneath.

What causes it?

Cellulitis usually occurs when bacteria (germs), which normally live on the skin's surface enters a break in the skin (a spot, scratch or cut). This then allows the bacteria to enter the deeper tissues and cause an infection. The infection may cause redness, swelling, warmth and pain.

What is the treatment?

Cellulitis responds well to antibiotic therapy. You will initially be prescribed a course of oral antibiotic tablets. However, if this does not improve the cellulitis, your doctor may now feel it is necessary to treat it with intravenous (IV) antibiotics.

IV antibiotics are used in many types of bacterial infections. In some condition's IV antibiotics are more effective than oral antibiotics at reducing the level of infection that has occurred.

Where will I receive treatment?

If your doctor feels you need IV antibiotic treatment you may be able to have this as an outpatient. Whenever possible, you will be asked to return daily to the hospital to either SDEC or MUDAS.

- Same Day Emergency Care Unit (SDEC) Stoke Mandeville Hospital,
- Multidisciplinary Unit Day Assessment Service (MUDAS), Wycombe Hospital. A Nurse, in conjunction with the Doctors, will fully assess whether this would be appropriate.

However, if this is not possible you may be able to receive your treatment at home.

Depending on where you have your treatment you may be discharged from hospital with a device (IV cannula) that will be inserted into one of the veins in your arm so that you can receive your IV treatment. You will be given a separate leaflet about your device and how to look after it.

If you receive your treatment at home the OPAT / IV Therapy Team will provide you with a set of hand-held notes containing information regarding your treatment. This should always be kept with you until the end of your antibiotic treatment. Your GP will be kept informed of the planned treatment on discharge from hospital.

How will I know if the IV antibiotics are working?

Your symptoms should start to improve a couple of days after you start taking your antibiotics. The team looking after you will also carefully monitor your progress daily to ensure your cellulitis is responding to the IV antibiotic treatment. Any blood samples taken will be reviewed by the team looking after you. They will ensure your treatment remains

appropriate and advise if any changes to treatment are required. Your GP will be kept fully informed of your progress or change of treatment plan
Once the infection has reduced you may require a course of oral antibiotics for about another five to seven days. These will be prescribed and dispensed by the discharging hospital.

What should I do if I feel unwell?

If you experience any of the following symptoms, please call the team looking after you. If there is no response or your symptoms worsen contact 111 or 999 in an emergency.

- Raised temperature (fever), shaking
- Increased pain or new pain
- Sore throat, aching, headache, nausea or diarrhoea
- Increased swelling to area / affected limb.
- The area of redness is spreading
- Difficulty in breathing
- Blisters forming around affected area
- Dizziness, facial flushing or rash
- Swelling anywhere else on the body, including the mouth or tongue

If you need to return to hospital for any reason, you should take your hand-held notes with you or tell them you are being treated as an outpatient with IV antibiotics

Things you can do to help your treatment:

Follow the advice given to you about the best position to sit in.

- If your cellulitis is on your legs, rest and try to keep them elevated as much as possible.
- If it is on your arm, try and keep your lower arm raised above the level of your elbow.
- If either of these positions are uncomfortable, lie down as much as possible to help the drainage and circulation of the affected limb.
- Although rest and elevation are essential, you must also move the joints around the affected limb, particularly your ankle if your lower leg is affected.
- Drink plenty of clear fluids e.g. water and squash.
- Finish the course of any prescribed oral antibiotics, even though you may feel better and the redness is subsiding.

Personal aftercare:

Once the redness and swelling around the affected area has subsided, it is important to look after your skin and decrease the risk of further problems.

You can do this or get someone to assist you by:

- Washing the affected area daily in warm water.
- Apply moisturiser to prevent dry skin, cracks or any scabs from forming
- Try to avoid injuring your skin either through trauma or exposure to direct sunlight.
- Ask your doctor about compression stockings to help prevent further episodes of cellulitis.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention & control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention & control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to and after leaving the ward. In some situations, hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser as hand sanitisers are not suitable for use when dealing with patients who have symptoms of diarrhoea.

SERVICE	TIMES AVAILABLE	CONTACT NUMBERS
IV Therapy Nurse/OPAT	8:30 – 4:30pm 7 days a week	01296 315485 07810 181584
Bank Holidays (on call basis)	9:00 - 4.30pm	07810 181584
Same Day Emergency Care Unit (SDEC) SMH	Mon – Fri 8:00 – 8:00pm Sat / Sun 8:00 – 5:00pm	01296 418175
Multidisciplinary Unit Day Assessment Service (MUDAS) Wycombe	Mon – Fri 8:30 – 5:00pm	01494 426318

If you need advice or further assistance, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS):

call 01296 316042 or email bht.pals@nhs.net

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor.

