

CELLULITIS

CELLULITIS is no fun! It is an acute bacterial infection that often requires hospitalization. This infection occurs because the body's immune system (lymphatic system) becomes overloaded with a bacteria and an infection of the skin develops. Bacteria such as streptococcus (strep) or staphylococcus (staph) typically are the bugs that start this problem. We are exposed to them all the time but usually our immune system can handle the war and fight them off by flushing them out of our waste disposal systems. If there is the tiniest crack in the skin, however, the bacterial cells can invade.

In a person with a compromised or damaged lymphatic system the bacteria can invade, even if there is no break in the skin. Simply having the lymphatic system overloaded is enough to beat it down and allow the bacteria to win. This is the case when you get sunburn or too much heat: The body has a significant increase in the lymphatic load (inflammation) and the lymphatics are unable to handle the increased load efficiently.

Cellulitis can cause a swelling pathology. If you have a swelling problem, cellulitis can make it worse.

The best defense is knowledge. Recognize the signs of cellulitis and act appropriately. **SIGNS OF CELLULITIS** are: Localized **REDNESS**, **WARMTH**, **SWELLING**, and **PAIN**, especially if these are associated with **RAPID** onset of **FLU-LIKE** symptoms: **FEVER**, **HEADACHE**, and **CHILLS**.

Visit your physician while you are feeling healthy to document your normal temperature and discuss how she or he treats infections. The doctor may give you a prescription for antibiotics to keep on hand, or tell what to do if you develop symptoms after office hours. Dr. Michael Földi, a leading lymphedema specialist, recommends taking oral antibiotics within hours of developing cellulitis to prevent the need for intravenous (IV) antibiotics or hospitalization.

Know your normal temperature and when you feel ill, take your temperature. If it is above 100 degrees (in a normal temperature 98.6) --you likely are fighting an infection. If your "normal" temperature is lower, a reading of 98.6. If you have an antibiotic on hand, prescribed by your doctor, start taking it. Then contact him or her. With small cuts or injuries to the skin, use triple antibiotic ointment or Neosporin and watch carefully. Contact your physician if it persists or worsens.

Repeat bouts of cellulitis can be prevented by treatment with Complex Decongestive Physiotherapy (CDP). Dr. Ethel Földi found that 30% of individuals with swelling problems reported history of repeated cellulitis attacks, but 90% of them did not have another attack after they completed CDP. They also remained compliant with a home program of wearing their compression garments.

Preventing **CELLULITIS** and the associated hospitalization is a primary reason to treat swelling pathology.

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HANG ON INSIDE OF BATHROOM CABINET—LIFELONG STRATEGIES

SIGNS OF INFLAMMATION:

Localized to one area of the body-signs of inflammation:

REDNESS	(may be light pink to start)
WARMTH	(use back of your hand to compare)
SWELLING	(orange-peel texture to skin or raised)
PAIN	(typically in the area of redness)

SIGNS OF INFECTION: With an inflammation and *RAPID* onset of *FLU-LIKE* symptoms:

FEVER
HEADACHE
CHILLS

ACTIONS NECESSARY:

CONTACT PHYSICIAN
START ANTIBIOTICS IMMEDIATELY

If you were given antibiotics at home—take them
Otherwise get to your doctor or go to an emergency room
(Visiting the emergency room may prevent a hospital stay)

STOP ALL swelling-disorder-treatment strategies:

Manual Lymphatic Mobilization massage
Exercise
Don't move about much when you have an infection to prevent it from
Spreading (end point of lymphatic system is the heart).
OK to keep wearing compression but make sure to check the skin