

Tissue Viability Team

Cellulitis of the lower limb

What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a skin infection. The symptoms may be:

- Redness
- A hot feeling on your skin
- Swelling
- Sometimes pain

Cellulitis is caused as a result of a break in the skin through which bacteria can spread. You may have flu like symptoms and feel generally unwell.

How do we treat it?

The doctor assessing your infection will determine how serious it is. They may do this by looking at your blood test and/or swab results, and by examining your leg. Once the doctor has assessed you:

- If the cellulitis is mild, you may be given antibiotics to take at home. The swelling in the affected area may take a few weeks to subside, although if you follow this advice it should aid your recovery.
- If the cellulitis is a little worse then you may need to stay in hospital and be given antibiotics through a vein in your arm or alternatively you may be given them to take by mouth.



Patient Information

How you can help:

- Take painkillers regularly because they won't work as well if you wait until the pain is too bad.
- Rest with your affected leg raised above the height of your chest if possible.
- Exercise regularly to keep the muscles working properly, if you are able to. If you have difficulty walking you might still be able to do the foot exercises described below.
- Eat a good well balanced diet.
- Inform the doctor or nurse immediately if you suffer a sudden increase in pain in your calf or foot, or if your toes become discoloured or feel numb.

Do not remove your dressings or bandages. Please inform the nurse if you feel they are uncomfortable and they can try and adjust them for you. If you remove the dressings or bandages without the nurses being aware, you may put yourself at greater risk of developing a further infection.

This also applies once you are at home. If you are concerned then you should contact your G.P or community nurse.

Do not scratch your legs as this can damage your skin and cause further infections, or possibly cause an injury to your leg.

Once the cellulitis is getting better:

- Take good care of your skin, keep it clean and apply a moisturising lotion to any dry patches of skin.
- Wear your support stockings (if you have been issued with these).
- Try to lose weight if you are overweight. This will take a lot of strain off your legs and help stop the cellulitis coming back.

Do not scratch your legs as this can damage your skin and cause infections.

Patient Information

Foot exercises

Even if you are unable to walk around easily without assistance, you can still do foot exercises. These exercises mimic the action of walking and so can improve the flow of blood in your veins. They should be performed several times a day, the more often the better.

- Rotate your foot in one direction, and then in the other, 10 times.
- Flex your foot by pulling your toes up towards your knees, and then point your foot down again, 10 times.
- When walking around the house, if you are able to take a moment to stand, hold the nearest piece of furniture and tiptoe up and down on the spot 10 times in a row.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6154 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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