

## **CELLULITIS**

### **PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **What is Cellulitis?**

Cellulitis is a non-contagious inflammation of the skin and the tissue under the skin, resulting from a bacterial infection. Although cellulitis most commonly occurs on the face and lower legs, any area on the body may be affected.

#### **How Do I know if I have Cellulitis?**

Cellulitis starts off very small and may grow fast in the first day. Signs and symptoms include the following:

- Pain, tenderness, swelling, warmth, and redness on the skin.
- Fever (may be accompanied by chills and sweats).
- A general ill feeling or feeling of malaise.
- Swelling in the lymph glands nearest the infection.

#### **What Causes Cellulitis and who is at risk?**

The skin normally has many types of bacteria on it. Unbroken skin prevents bacteria from entering and growing within the body. Cellulitis may occur when there is a break or opening in the skin, causing the skin to lose its barrier protection and become infected. This infection can cause a tissue reaction or inflammation. The following may put an individual at risk for cellulitis:

- A suppressed immune system due to illness or from taking medication such as cortisone drugs.
- Chronic illness such as diabetes or peripheral vascular disease.
- Any injury that breaks the skin, or makes the skin sore including a surgical wound, insect bites or stings, burns or skin ulcers.
- Use of intravenous drugs.

## How is Cellulitis treated?

Cellulitis is treated with antibiotics which are prescribed to fight the infection. It is important to finish all of the antibiotics as prescribed, even if your symptoms disappear quickly. If untreated, cellulitis can be life threatening. Analgesics may be prescribed to control pain. The severity of the cellulitis will determine whether you are hospitalized or treated as an outpatient. The following may be prescribed to treat cellulites:

- Elevation of the extremities to decrease the swelling
- Keeping the skin clean and dry
- Dressing changes if indicated and prescribed by your physician.

## How can I prevent Cellulitis?

- Wear protective equipment on skin when involved in sports, activities or work that may cause injury.
- Keep your skin clean, soft and dry. Use a mild soap (such as Dove) and use moisturizers.
- Individuals with diabetes or peripheral vascular disease should examine their legs and feet daily.
- Observe skin for any non-healing sores.
- Report all symptoms of cellulitis to your physician.

## How Can I get More Information?

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- **Medline Plus** - [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus) (1-888-FIND NLM)  
(nlm: National Library of Medicine)
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**Reference:** "Cellulitis" Medline Plus, 2001,  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000855.htm>

*For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenhosp.org](http://www.greenhosp.org) and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education*