

## What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is an acute spreading inflammation of the skin and subcutaneous tissues. It causes pain, warmth, swelling and redness. Most episodes of cellulitis are believed to be caused by the bacteria Streptococci.

## What causes cellulitis?

Any break in your skin can allow bacteria to enter, which can lead to cellulitis. Breaks in the skin include a wound, scratch or insect bite, or skin inflammation such as athlete's foot, eczema or dermatitis. However, it's not always possible to identify the cause and cellulitis can occur without warning.

## How do I know if I have cellulitis?

The infected area can develop a rash or become red, hot and tender to the touch. The redness can develop over a few hours and start spreading. You might feel unwell first, as if you are coming down with flu, but not always. Symptoms may include fever, shivers, muscular aches and pains, headache, nausea and vomiting.

## Why can cellulitis lead to lymphoedema?

The relationship between cellulitis and lymphoedema appears to be a vicious cycle:

People with cellulitis are at risk of developing lymphoedema and people with lymphoedema are at high risk of developing cellulitis. So it can become a vicious cycle.



## How can I reduce the risk of developing cellulitis?

It is essential to look after your skin and try to avoid cracks, cuts and open areas. Regularly check your skin on any area affected by lymphoedema and if you have a cut, apply antiseptic. If a cut looks like it is not healing, contact your GP. Try to avoid injury by using oven gloves, gardening gloves and nail clippers rather than scissors for cutting your fingernails and toenails.

For more information, please see the skin care section.

## What to do if you think you have cellulitis

Contact your doctor immediately because you will need to take a course of antibiotics. Treating cellulitis is very important when you have lymphoedema because you can become very unwell.

If you have lymphoedema, it is important to:

- Remove any compression garments that are pressing on the affected limb until it feels better. Start using the limb or affected part again as soon as you can.
- Stop other forms of treatment such as manual lymphatic drainage and exercise programmes while you are being treated for cellulitis.
- Rest with the affected limb elevated to a comfortable position – ideally raised to the same level as your heart.
- Drink plenty of water.
- You can take paracetamol but avoid anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen.



- If you are familiar with cellulitis attacks and have appropriate oral antibiotics to hand, you should start taking them immediately and finish the course completely even if symptoms improve.
- You can find useful information at [www.thebls.com/documents-library/consensus-document-on-the-management-of-cellulitis-in-lymphoedema](http://www.thebls.com/documents-library/consensus-document-on-the-management-of-cellulitis-in-lymphoedema)