

Cellulitis of the lower leg

Information for service users and carers

What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a spreading bacterial infection of the skin, commonly involving the leg. The infection can make your skin red, hot, swollen and painful. It can be easily treated with antibiotics and most people make a complete recovery.

Cellulitis is not the same as cellulite. Cellulite is a cosmetic problem that is caused by fatty deposits that form under the skin, and it has no relation to cellulitis.

Who is most likely to get cellulitis?

You are more at risk if you have a leg ulcer, swollen legs, diabetes or are overweight.

What is the treatment?

Cellulitis can be treated effectively with antibiotics by mouth but a low number of people may require intravenous antibiotics and possibly hospitalisation.

Can I prevent cellulitis from happening?

It is difficult to prevent it completely but try to follow the advice on maintaining healthy legs.

Maintaining healthy legs

The main aim is to prevent breakages in the skin so that bacteria are unable to invade:

- Moisturise your legs with a simple moisturiser once or twice a day to improve skin elasticity
- Elevate your legs when resting to reduce the risk of swelling
- Avoid knocking your legs (take extra care when in the supermarket or around shopping trolleys)
- Take regular walks if possible
- Exercise your calf muscles and ankles by pointing and flexing your toes and feet to improve your circulation
- Drink plenty of fluids (two litres per day is recommended)
- You may be advised to wear compression socks to stop any swelling increasing.

If you suspect you have cellulitis you can:

1. Contact the Lower Limb Service or your GP as you may need antibiotics
2. Inspect the reddened area regularly to see if it is spreading and draw around it if possible
3. Take regular pain killers
4. Keep moisturising your legs with a simple moisturiser
5. Elevate your legs as much as possible
6. Drink plenty of fluids.

Where can I get help?

The Lower Limb Service is a team of two specialist nurses who are experts in managing cellulitis, tissue viability and skin care of the lower limb. They run leg clinics and also the Leg Excellence in Greenwich Group which encourages and promotes self-care and prevention of further problems of the lower limb.

Lower Limb Clinics (for people with cellulitis or complications of cellulitis of the lower limb with leg ulcers, chronic swollen legs, lymphoedema or dermatitis.)

You will need to be referred by a healthcare professional or you can refer yourself by calling the number at the bottom of this page. You will be offered an appointment at one of the following clinics.

- Garland Road Health Centre – Monday 9am to 5pm
- Manor Brook Medical Centre – Friday 8am to 5pm

Leg Excellence in Greenwich Group (LEGG) for people who would like a group environment for care, advice, support and education about their legs.

These groups are run throughout the borough. Please contact the Lower Limb Service for information about a group near you.

How to contact the Lower Limb Service

For emergency advice or details about groups near you contact the Single Point of Access Team on 020 8836 8622, Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5pm.

The Integrated Wound Care Service

www.oxleas.nhs.uk

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