

AHRQ Safety Program for Telemedicine: Improving Antibiotic Use

Cellulitis – Patient Guide

What can I do to feel better besides taking antibiotics?

- You should start feeling a little better within 1–2 days of starting antibiotics. The redness and swelling may not go away right away but should gradually improve. It is normal for the redness to look slightly worse during the first couple of days due to inflammation, even if the infection is starting to improve.
- Aside from acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®) as needed, additional medications are usually not necessary, besides the antibiotics you have been prescribed.
- Elevating the affected limb whenever possible helps reduce swelling and promote healing. For example, if your leg is affected, try lying down and propping your leg up on pillows.
- Warm compresses, as needed, can help ease discomfort
- It is preferable to keep the affected area dry.

How can I prevent cellulitis from occurring again?

- When the cellulitis resolves, keep your skin moisturized to avoid cracks that allow bacteria to enter.
- Consider keeping the heels of your feet moisturized with petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) to reduce the risk of foot infections, especially in diabetics.
- Treat athlete's foot if you notice scaling or itching between the toes.
- Wear properly fitting shoes and avoid walking barefoot outdoors.
- Manage conditions like diabetes and obesity as directed by your healthcare provider, as these can increase the risk of cellulitis.
- If you have swelling in your legs, wear compression stockings and elevate your legs when possible.

What should I do if my symptoms are not improving?

- If your symptoms are not improving by day 3, or if at any time you experience any of the following, seek immediate in person care, preferably in an emergency department:
 - The redness or swelling is rapidly spreading
 - Blisters or black/dark skin areas are forming
 - You have a high fever, chills, or feel more ill
 - The area becomes extremely painful or you are unable to use the affected limb
 - You feel confused or have trouble eating or drinking



This document is intended to provide health-related information so that you may be better informed. It is not a substitute for your healthcare provider's medical advice and should not be relied upon for treatment for specific medical conditions.



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