

**Patient
Information**

Lower limb cellulitis

Introduction

You have been asked to attend Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) or the Ambulatory Emergency Care (AEC) departments because you may have an infection in your legs called cellulitis. This leaflet contains information about lower limb cellulitis and how it will be treated.

What is lower limb cellulitis?

Cellulitis is an infection of the skin surface and the tissues underneath. Any area of your body can be affected but the legs are the most common place.

Why do people get lower limb cellulitis?

Normally, our skin works as an effective barrier to protect us against infection. Cuts and scratches can be a way for bacteria to get into and under the skin. When this happens, the bacteria can multiply quickly causing infection. Some people can have cellulitis without a break in the skin being found.

Who is at risk from lower limb cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a common medical condition which can happen again. You are more at risk of getting cellulitis if you have:

- Athlete's foot
- Any cuts or insect bites to your legs
- Swollen legs
- Other medical conditions such as diabetes or eczema

Medications which may lower your immune system, such as steroids or chemotherapy can also make you more at risk of cellulitis.

Reference No.

GHPI1307_05_22

Department

SDEC

Review due

May 2025

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How do you know if you have lower limb cellulitis?

There are many symptoms that could be caused by cellulitis:

- The skin on the leg feels warm to the touch
- One or both legs may look more swollen
- One or both legs may look more red
- One or both legs may feel tender when touched
- You may feel unwell
- You may feel like you have a temperature

Tests

We will record your blood pressure, heart rate (pulse), temperature and breathing rate. You will have bloods taken to test for the level of infection in your body.

The nurse will often draw a line on your leg where your skin starts to become red. This will allow us to see if your cellulitis is responding to treatment.

What can you do to help your cellulitis heal?

Try to keep your foot raised higher than your hip to reduce any swelling. It is important that you help the circulation in your leg, so where possible walk a short distance every hour. If you are unable to do this try to wriggle your ankles and toes.

Eating a balanced diet which is rich in fruit, vegetable and protein will help your body to repair itself and fight infection

If you have cellulitis

Treatment with antibiotics will start straight away. If the infection is mild, we can treat this effectively with antibiotic tablets. There are times when antibiotic tablets are not strong enough and you need the medicine to be given directly into your vein (intravenously).

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In SDEC/AEC, we can treat patients who may need stronger antibiotics with daily intravenous treatment. The antibiotic will be given through a small plastic tube which is placed either in your hand or your arm (a cannula); you will need to return to the unit every day until your lower limb cellulitis starts to get better. This can be up to 3 days of intravenous antibiotic treatment.

If you start to suffer any of the following symptoms

- Severe pain in your leg
- Feeling unwell
- Symptoms that get worse very quickly
- Skin that is affected by cellulitis that goes dusky, purple and blisters

Please contact SDEC/AEC or NHS 111 for advice.

Contact information

If you are worried about any aspects of this information please contact:

SDEC

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 6677
Open daily, 08:00am to 8:00pm.

AEC

Cheltenham General Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 3618
Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 8:00pm

NHS 111

Tel: 111

Content reviewed: May 2022