

**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.

GHP11307_03_25

Department

SDEC

Review due

March 2028

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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 your 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 you can 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 often be managed with up to 3 days of intravenous antibiotic treatment, but sometimes we may need to do this for a bit longer.

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:

Same Day Emergency Care Unit (SDEC)

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 6677 or 6676

Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 11:00pm

Bank holidays and weekends, 8:00am to 9:00pm

Ambulatory Emergency Care

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 3618

Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 8:00 pm

NHS 111

Tel: 111

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Making a choice

Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>