



University of North Carolina Wilmington
Abrons Student Health Center

INSTRUCTION SHEET: CELLULITIS

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed cellulitis. Cellulitis is an infection of the skin and tissue just under the skin.

The infection, caused by bacteria (germs), produces inflammation of the skin. Symptoms include: redness, swelling, warmth, and tenderness-to-touch of the affected area. Itching or even pain in the affected area can occur. Fever is infrequent; if fever is present, it is usually low-grade (less than 101).

Cellulitis often occurs around a break in the skin, such as a cut or scrape. Even an insect bite or tiny cut a person is unaware of can lead to infection. Any break in the skin allows bacteria (normally present in large numbers on the skin surface) to enter normally germ-free layers under the skin.

The key to treatment of cellulitis is antibiotics, usually given by mouth. Topical (rubbed on) antibiotics are not effective.

Cellulitis usually responds well to treatment. Be aware, though, that the infection can spread and even affect the whole body.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR INFECTION:

1. Rest the affected area. If the affected part is an arm or leg, *elevate* the limb above the level of your heart. Rest and elevation help reduce swelling and discomfort.
2. Take the prescribed antibiotic as directed, until gone.
3. Over-the-counter medications can help relieve discomfort associated with cellulitis. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on personal preference.
4. Make a follow-up visit with the Student Health Center or schedule an appointment with your personal/referral provider within a few days of your the Student Health Center visit. Your provider can make sure the infection is healing properly.
5. If your condition worsens, seek medical care *promptly*. Return to the Student Health Center, see your personal/referral doctor, or go to the closest emergency department. Specifically, seek care if the infected area is increasing in size, your overall condition worsens, or you get whole-body symptoms. Whole-body symptoms include high fever (102 or greater), hard shaking chills, severe headache, repeated vomiting, etc.