

Cellulitis and its management

Information and Advice



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What is Lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is a swelling of the limb(s) or body due to the accumulation of lymph.

Lymph is a colourless fluid. It normally drains back into the blood circulation by a network of vessels and nodes.

The lymphatic system is an important part of our body's defences against infection. It removes excess protein, dead or abnormal cells and bacteria.

When the lymphatic system is impaired lymph flow is disrupted and swelling occurs to the affected limb(s).

What is Cellulitis?

Cellulitis is an acute inflammation of the skin and subcutaneous tissues. In lymphoedema, Cellulitis can vary in how it looks and differs from classical Cellulitis. This is often referred to as an acute inflammatory episode (AIE).

Bacteria called Group A Streptococci are believed to cause most episodes.

Features of Cellulitis

Features can vary from patient to patient. It is characterised by spreading inflammation, pain, movement, swelling and redness. Some episodes are accompanied by high fever or rigors, others can be milder with minimal or no fever. In addition there is increased swelling of the affected limb(s) in the affected area.

Other features include:

- Sudden onset
- Rash
- Flu like symptoms
- Nausea/vomiting

Treatment of Cellulitis

Antibiotics are the most common treatment. These can be given as tablets or via a drip in hospital for more severe infections. Hospital admission would be based on the level of (systemic) upset. Hospital admission may be prevented by early recognition and monitoring. Advice on this may be given by a GP. Patients should contact their doctor for advice and monitoring.

Recurrent Cellulitis

Preventative antibiotics should be offered to patients who have two or more attacks a year. This is usually Penicillin. The dose may be reduced after one year if successful. Prophylaxis may need to be life long if relapse occurs.

Prevention of Cellulitis

Compliance of the four cornerstones of lymphoedema treatment:

- Skincare
- Simple lymphatic drainage
- Exercise and wearing of hosiery will help

We are committed to providing high quality care. If you have a suggestion, comment or complaint about the care or services you have received, or if you need this leaflet in another format, please contact the Director of Clinical Services on 01977 781468.



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