

Skin Infection: Cellulitis

What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is an infection of the skin and the tissue under it caused by bacteria. This infection is serious and needs to be treated right away. Without treatment the infection can damage skin tissues and spread quickly to other parts of your body. A skin infection that is not treated right away may lead to:

- Infection in your blood
- Tissue death (gangrene) and possible loss of a body part (amputation)
- Infection in your eyes, causing blindness
- Infection in your brain (meningitis)
- Death

What is the cause?

Several different types of bacteria can cause cellulitis. The bacteria get into the body through a cut, bite, or sore.

Your child is more likely to get cellulitis if he has a medical condition, like diabetes or HIV/AIDS, that makes it hard for the body to fight infection.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Redness, swelling, and skin that feels hot to the touch
- Extreme tenderness or pain
- Red streaks that spread away from the wound or sore
- Pus-filled sores
- Swollen and tender lumps in the neck, armpits, or groin
- Fever

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your child's symptoms and medical history and examine your child. Tests may include:

- Tests of a sample of pus
- A biopsy, which is the removal of a small sample of infected tissue for testing
- Blood tests
- X-rays

How is it treated?

The infection is treated with an antibiotic. If your child is taking an antibiotic by mouth, your provider will probably want to see your child or talk to you 1 or 2 days after your first visit to make sure the medicine is working. If the infection

does not get better, or if the infection is severe, your child may need to stay in the hospital to receive antibiotics through an IV.

If your child has a sinus infection that is causing cellulitis around an eye, your child may need surgery to drain the infection from the eye socket and sinuses.

How can I take care of myself?

- Make sure that your child takes his medicine for as long as your healthcare provider prescribes, even if your child feels better. If your child stops taking the medicine too soon, it may not kill all of the bacteria and your child may get sick again.
- Ask your child's healthcare provider how to care for the infected area. For example, your provider may recommend keeping the infected area up on pillows (above the level of the heart) when your child sits or lies down to decrease swelling and pain.
- Put a warm, moist towel on the reddened area.
- Give your child pain medicine, such as ibuprofen, as directed by your provider. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. Read the label and give as directed. Check with your healthcare provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- Ask your healthcare provider:
 - How and when you will hear your child's test results
 - How long it will take to recover from this illness
 - If there are activities your child should avoid and when your child can return to normal activities
 - What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if your child has them
- Make sure you know when your child should come back for a checkup. Keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

How can I help prevent cellulitis?

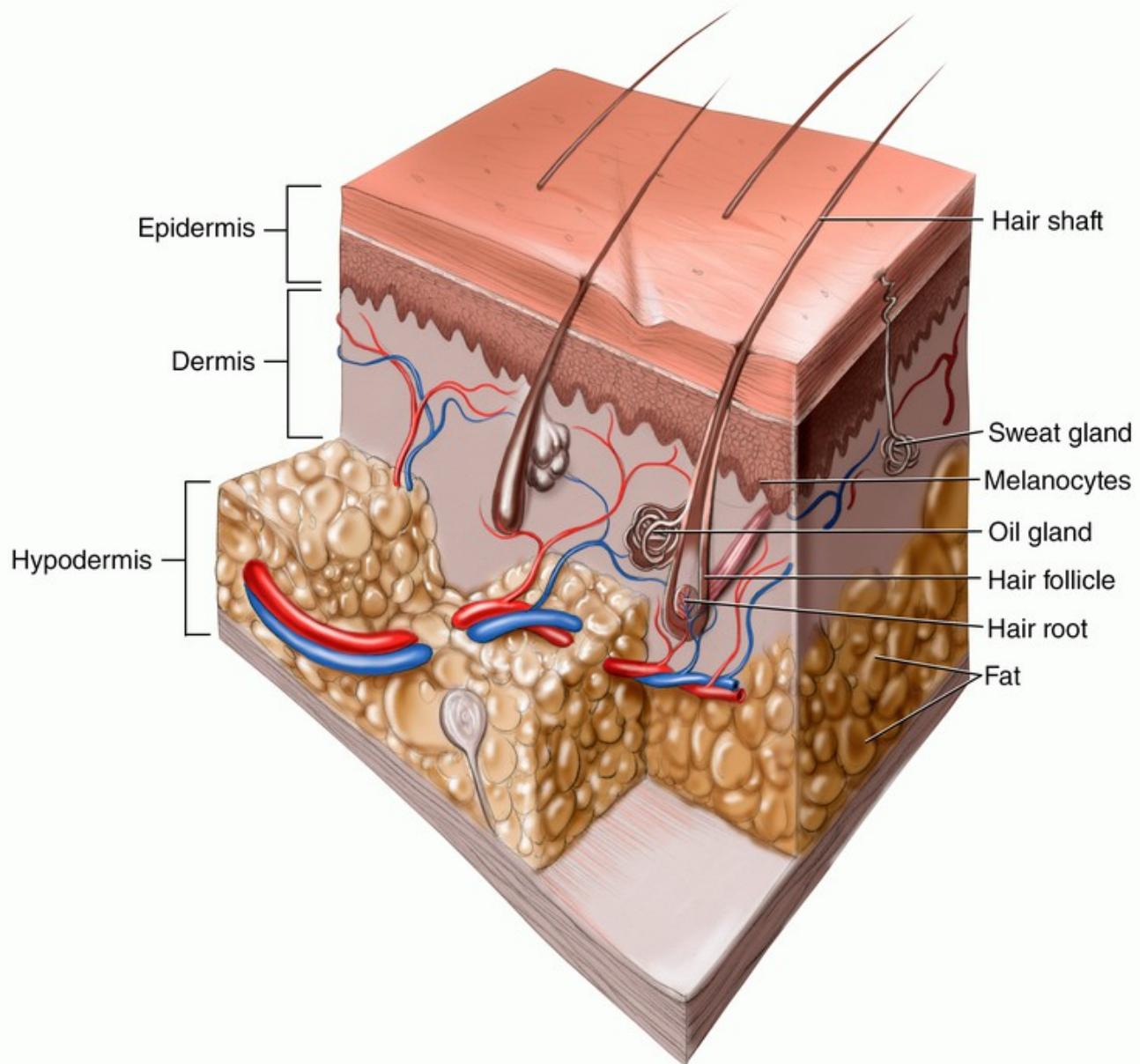
- Clean cuts, scrapes, and other skin injuries well with soap and water.
- Keep wounds and sores clean and dry. You may need to cover some wounds with a bandage to keep them clean and dry. Change bandages every day, Change them more often if they get dirty or wet.
- See your healthcare provider for treatment as soon as possible if a wound or sore shows signs of infection. Signs of infection include new or worse redness, swelling, pain, warmth, or drainage from the wound.
- If your child has diabetes, follow your provider's instructions for good skin care and keep your child's blood sugar under good control.

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Skin: Cross Section



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