



You came to the emergency department with a red, painful, swollen area of skin. The doctor thinks this is cellulitis, a skin infection, and that it can be treated at home with antibiotics.

What is it?

Cellulitis is an infection of the deeper layers of the skin. Germs get in through a cut, bite, crack or dry skin, often on the legs. The skin becomes red, warm, swollen and sore, and you may feel unwell or feverish. With antibiotics it usually starts to improve within 2 to 3 days, but the redness can take longer to fade.

Looking after yourself at home

- Raise the affected arm or leg above the level of your heart as much as you can. This reduces swelling.
- If the doctor drew a line around the redness, check each day whether it is spreading past the line.
- Drink plenty of fluids and rest while you feel unwell.
- Keep the skin clean. Treat any cuts, cracks or athlete's foot to stop the infection coming back.
- Do not scratch or squeeze the area.

Medicines

- Take the antibiotics exactly as prescribed and finish the whole course, even when the skin looks better.
- The redness may look a little worse in the first day. This is common, so watch for the signs below.
- Paracetamol can help the pain, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre after 2 days of antibiotics, or on the day you were given, for a check.
- See your family doctor if it is not clearly better after 5 days of antibiotics.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- The redness spreads quickly, or keeps spreading after 2 days of antibiotics
- High fever, shivering, or feeling very unwell or confused
- Pain that is much worse than the redness looks, or the skin turns dark, purple or blistered
- Red streaks running up the arm or leg
- Redness or swelling around the eye, or any change in your vision
- Vomiting, so you cannot keep your antibiotics down



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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