
Patient Information

Infections - Signs and Symptoms

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Infections Signs and Symptoms

Whenever you have a scrape, cut, puncture wound, or any other break in the skin, there's a possibility of an infection.

Natural Protection

The skin is the first line of protection from infection. Intact skin is very good at preventing germs from entering the body.

Even when there is a cut or other break in the skin, your body can take steps to lessen the chance on infection. For example, a certain amount of bleeding helps to flush out any germs.

As soon as you are cut, the white blood cells, the cells that fight infection, begin to work, destroying bacteria and viruses.

What To Watch For

There are certain signs of infection you should watch for which include:

- Redness around the wound
- Red streaking going from the wound towards your heart
- Swelling of the wound
- Pus, whitish or white-yellow discharge from the wound

- More than minor pain
- The wound feels warmer than the skin around it.

If any of these changes occur, then call the office right away.

What Can Be Done?

If treated early, a wound infection should cause no significant problems. However, if not treated quickly, a wound infection can become serious and may even require hospitalization for proper treatment.

Applying heat to an infected wound is the first step in treating an infection. Moist heat works better than dry heat. A warm-to-hot wet towel works well. Be careful not to burn yourself.

Sometimes an infected wound needs to be surgically opened and drained. Don't try to do this yourself with a needle – it may make the infection worse.

What About Antibiotics?

Antibiotics can work wonders for infections caused by bacteria. There are many different types of antibiotics, and many different bacteria that can cause infections.

Not all infections need antibiotics. Certain antibiotics may not be the right one for your infection. Your doctor is the person best able to select the right drug for your infection. Never use leftover antibiotics!

Why Isn't Everyone With A Cut Started On Antibiotics?

If antibiotics are used unnecessarily and then the cut becomes infected, the bacteria may be resistant to common antibiotics and the infection is harder to treat.

If the wound is particularly dirty, or if the doctor believes the chances of infection are high, then you may be started on antibiotics to help prevent an infection.

Additional Questions

Your doctor or pharmacist can answer any of your questions about the medications you are taking. Don't hesitate to call.

Final Thoughts

All of us want to help you recover from your injury as quickly as possible. We want you to understand your injury, our treatments, the medicines we prescribe, and the steps you can take to help the healing process.