

BOILS

(Furuncles)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A painful, deep, bacterial infection of a hair follicle. Boils are common and somewhat contagious. They can occur anywhere on the skin, but most often appear on the neck, face, buttocks, and breasts. Carbuncles are clusters of boils that occur when the infection spreads through small tunnels underneath the skin.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- A domed nodule that is painful, tender and red and has pus on the surface. Boils can appear suddenly and ripen in 24 hours. They are usually 1-1/2 cm to 3 cm in diameter; some are larger.
- Fever (rare).
- Swelling of the closest lymph glands.

CAUSES

Infection, usually from *Staphylococcus* bacteria, that begins in the hair follicle and bores into the skin's deeper layers.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Poor nutrition.
- Illness that has lowered resistance.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Use of immunosuppressive drugs.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Keep the skin clean.
- If someone in the household has a boil, don't share towels or washcloths or clothing with that person.
- If you have a chronic disease (such as diabetes mellitus), be sure to follow your medical regimen.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Without treatment, a boil will heal in 10 to 20 days. With treatment, the boil should heal in less time, symptoms will be less severe, and new boils should not appear. The pus that drains when a boil opens spontaneously may contaminate nearby skin, causing new boils.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- The infection may enter the bloodstream and spread to other body parts.
- Scarring.
- Boils may recur.
- Family members may need treatment.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnosis is usually determined by the appearance of the red, inflamed swelling. A laboratory study may be made of the material from the boil.
- Do not burst a boil as this may spread bacteria.
- Taking showers instead of baths reduces chances of spreading infection.
- Relieve pain with gentle heat from warm-water soaks. Use 3 or 4 times daily for 20 minutes. Wash your hands carefully after touching the boil.
- Prevent the spread of boils by using clean towels only once or using paper towels and discarding them.
- Doctor's treatment may include incision and drainage of the boil.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics may be prescribed if infection is severe.
- Don't use non-prescription antibiotic creams or ointments on the boil's surface. They are ineffective.

ACTIVITY

Decrease activity until the boil heals. Avoid sweating and avoid contact sports (such as wrestling) while lesions are present.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has a boil.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - Symptoms don't improve in 3 to 4 days, despite treatment.
 - New boils appear.
 - Fever.
 - Other family members develop boils.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.