

△ GENERAL INFORMATION

An *abscess* is one type of infection. Many people think all infections are the same, but they are not. This is important to remember because different types of infection often need to be treated differently.

Below is a list of some types of infection that occur in the body.

- *Cellulitis* is inflamed tissue that is red, swollen, and painful, but no liquid pus is present.
- *Lymphangitis* is inflammation along the lymph channels; they commonly show as red streaks.
- *Erysipelas* is a combination of both of the above that comes on suddenly, spreads swiftly, and causes pain, chills, and fever.
- *Abscess* (boil) is a local collection of pus.
- *Furuncle* is a tiny pus pocket of the sweat gland or hair follicle.
- *Carbuncle* is a number of furuncles together.
- *Bacteremia*: Bacteria are in the blood but do not cause any symptoms.
- *Septicemia*: Bacteria are in the blood stream and produce severe symptoms of infection.

○ TREATMENT: Nonsurgical

When antibiotics are used to treat an infection, the following should be considered:

- *Choosing an antibiotic to kill the responsible bacteria*: Whenever possible and useful, some of the pus will be obtained for testing to see which antibiotic is most likely to kill the bacteria found in it. When it is not possible to get some pus from the area, the doctor will use the antibiotic most often effective against the bacteria that usually causes such infections.
- *Knowing if the antibiotic can reach the infection*: The doctor has information regarding which kinds of infection block the antibiotics from reaching them.
- *Does the selected antibiotic itself have any harmful side effects*: Some antibiotics are good at fighting the infection but can have harmful side effects. The antibiotic will have to be chosen with this in mind.
- *How to help the body boost its own defenses*: Increasing the flow of blood to the area brings in white blood cells, whose important job is to fight infection. One way is to place warm, moist packs over the area as follows:
 - Dissolve 1 tablespoon of ordinary table salt in a quart of warm—*not hot*—tap water.
 - Dip a clean washcloth into this fluid and squeeze out the excess.
 - Place the washcloth over the area to be treated.
 - Over this, place a thin sheet of plastic.
 - Over this place a dry towel.
 - Over this place a heating pad on *low* (not medium or high, but low).
 - Make yourself comfortable and keep the warm packs on for 20 minutes, three times a day, or as often as you are instructed. You do not have to change the moist towels during a session.

- For each new session, you should change the washcloth, but you can keep the same plastic and dry towel (Fig. 1).

○ TREATMENT: Surgical

If pus is present, it is necessary to let it out. Usually, this is done by an operation.

PREOPERATIVE PREPARATION

- You may be given antibiotics even before the pus is drained so that they can have a head start in your blood stream.
- Do not eat or drink anything for 8 hours before the operation.
- You will be given medicine that will make you feel drowsy before you are brought to the operating room.

□ OPERATION

- The type of operation performed on you and whether it is done under local or general anesthesia will depend on your special circumstances. This will be explained to you beforehand.
- If the operation is to be done under local anesthesia, the skin over the area of the abscess will be made numb and draped with towels.
- Generally, an incision is made over the area of the pus to let it out.
- A soft rubber drain may be left in the incision for a while to make certain the incision doesn't heal over before all the pus is out.

POSTOPERATIVE CARE

- When your blood pressure, pulse, and breathing are stable, a decision will be made regarding when you can go home.
 - For most surface abscesses, you should be able to go home that same day.
 - If yours is a deep abscess requiring more than just making an incision on your skin you may need to stay in the hospital.
- When you are ready to go home, arrangements will be made for the following:
 - A prescription for antibiotics and pain medicine.
 - Instructions on how to change the dressing, if this is necessary.

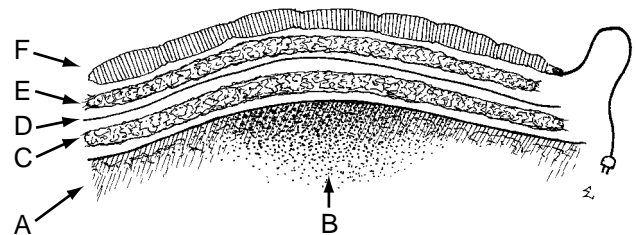


Figure 1. A, Flesh; B, inflamed area; C, moist towel; D, thin sheet of plastic; E, Dry towel; F, heating pad.

- Directions on whether you should continue with warm, moist packs.

⊕ **HOME CARE**

- You may walk about as you wish. You may eat as you wish.
- Increase your diet as tolerated.
- Speak with a doctor on the best way for you to shower or bathe.

- The treatment and aftercare of an abscess can vary widely for each patient. There may be detailed discussions with you on what you may do and how to help take care of yourself.

📞 **CALL OUR OFFICE IF**

- You develop any unusual symptoms.
- You develop a temperature higher than 100°F.
- You have any questions.