

BOILS

(Furuncles)

Information From Your Health Care Provider



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Boils are a painful, bacterial infection of a hair follicle. They 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.

FREQUENT SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- A domed nodule that is painful, tender, red, and is filled with pus. Boils can appear suddenly and ripen in 24 hours.
- Fever (rarely).
- Swelling of the closest lymph glands.

CAUSES

Infection, usually from *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria. The bacteria (germs) normally live on the skin surface or in the nose. The germs may enter a damaged (such as from a razor cut) hair follicle and get into the skin's deeper layers.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Poor nutrition or poor hygiene.
- Diabetes.
- Other skin problems (such as acne or skin infection).
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Keep the skin clean.
- If someone in the household has a boil, don't share towels, washcloths, or clothing with that person.
- If you have a chronic disease (such as diabetes), 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 on its own may infect 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.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider can diagnose boils by an exam of the affected skin area. A medical study may be made of the material (pus) from the boil.
- Do not squeeze the boil or pop it with a needle. Doing so may make the infection worse.
- You may be advised to gently soak the area with a warm, moist cloth. Do this 3 or 4 times daily for 20 minutes. If the boil starts to drain, wash the area with soap and apply a loose bandage. 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.
- Your health care provider's treatment may include incision and drainage of the boil.

MEDICATIONS

Antibiotics to be taken by mouth may be prescribed if infection is severe.

ACTIVITY

Usually no limits. Athletes involved in contact sports should ask their health care provider and their coaches about sports participation.

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.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page ☐