

# Injection Use Infection Process

*Waiting to seek help often means a deeper infection, longer healing time, and more skin and vein scarring. Scarring causes poorer circulation and lessens usable injection sites. After a wound, your healed skin functions at 60-80% of normal skin function.*

## Abscess

An abscess is a warm, dark bubble of pus on the skin at risk of spreading an infection to other areas of your body. It forms to wall off a bacterial infection from the rest of your body, making it hard for your immune system to reach.

## Cellulitis

Cellulitis of the skin may then develop around an abscess when the infection in the abscess travels into the surrounding skin leading to redness, swelling, warmth, and site pain.

## Sepsis

Sepsis is a potentially life-threatening infection, developing last when an abscess or a cellulitis skin infection travels through your bloodstream and lymph system, leading to blood poisoning. Seek medical help immediately if fever, chills, or shaking occurs or if site redness, pain, swelling, or warmth worsens.



## The Following Damages Skin

- **Chemicals:** injecting drugs or what the drug is cut with
- **Mechanical:** friction, scratching, cold temps, too wet or sweaty, needles, surgery, shaving
- **Microbial:** bacteria, yeast, staph, and microorganisms are all around us

## Quick Prevention Tips

- Rotate injection site.
- Use warm compress or washcloth after injecting.
- Use a new, sterile needle every time you inject.
- Wash hands regularly with soap.
- Clean site with alcohol pad before injecting.

# Caring for Injection Wounds

*Your hard work and self-care will shorten healing time, leave less scarring, and keep your veins healthy for safer injection.*

## Disinfecting and Decreasing Skin Irritation

**Wash hands with soap** before and after contact with site, touching it as little as possible.

**Wash site with soap** and water before covering with a band aid or gauze.

**Change dressing** at least daily. Change more often or use a more absorbent pad, such as menstrual pads, if skin becomes too sweaty, such as during summer.

**Use paper tape with gauze** and **avoid using tape adhesives** directly on site since it can irritate or tear surrounding skin when removing.

**Use saline solution** or sterile water to dampen dressings before taking them off. Peeling away dry dressings can tear and remove healing skin.

**Pack deep wounds** with gauze dampened with saline solution to help heal properly \*\*for how long??

**Soak site** in warm water with Epsom salt or table salt.

**Use antibiotic ointment** on site after it drains and scabs over or if wound is too dry, such as during winter, for no more than 3 days (overuse kills good cells).

**Use Vaseline or mineral oil** to create a protective barrier against skin breakdown due to wound drainage or a moist wound.

## Reducing Inflammation and Pain

**Apply a warm compress** or washcloth for missed shots or abscesses for 15-20 minutes 3 times a day (helps circulate drug and improve circulation, shortens healing time, decreases inflammation, less scarring, healthier veins).

**Elevate site** above heart to improve circulation. Treatment failure is more commonly due to failure to elevate than failure of antibiotics.

**Take ibuprofen or Tylenol** to reduce site pain and inflammation.

**Take entire round of antibiotics** even if the infection looks better. Antibiotics can take time to heal wounds, especially when other health conditions are present since dead bacteria in skin continue to induce swelling and inflammation.

**Rotate injection sites** at least 1 inch away from missed shot or abscess to reduce infection risk and speed up healing.

**Monitor site** for infections by marking edges of wound with a marker and take a picture to track wound size. If it expands, seek medical help. Write down your symptoms and the date to track recovery.

## Wound Healing Self Care

**Eat protein** (peanuts, cheese, yogurt, beans, milk) and stay hydrated with water to boost your immune's system ability to fight infection.

**Rest** to have time off your feet at syringe exchanges, libraries, or city benches. You can also visit Dorothy Day Place, Higher Ground, Family Service Center, and the Opportunity Center where they provide meals, shelter, opportunities to find jobs, and secure housing and medical care.

**Reduce smoking** (smoking causes blood vessels to become smaller and reduces circulation).

**Treat health conditions** like diabetes or high blood sugar which can cause decreased circulation and feed bacteria.

**Exercise and stretching** increases circulation (while pain limits activity). Pumping calf or arm muscles improves circulation and helps veins pop.

## Staying Connected

**Seek medical help** at a clinic or ER if there is increased drainage, pus, redness, swelling, smell, site pain or warmth, resistance to healing, fever, shaking, chills. You may need oral antibiotics. Life threatening blood poisoning could occur if untreated.

**Stay in touch** with people you trust for support. You can talk through your pain (throbbing, aching, stabbing) and other concerns to find solutions together.

**Advocate for yourself.** Anybody can get skin infections. You should be treated without shame or judgement by helping professionals.

**Make a doctor visit count.** If seen at a clinic or ER, you can update your vaccines, STI testing, or treat other health concerns.

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# You are worthy of care.

