

Abscesses

(A painful collection of pus beneath the skin caused by infection)

What Is an Abscess?

An **abscess** is a localized collection of **pus trapped beneath the skin** caused by infection. The body creates pus as it fights bacteria and inflammation.

Abscesses often appear as:

- Painful swollen lumps
- Red or warm areas
- Tender bumps that may drain pus

They can occur almost anywhere on the body.



What Causes Abscesses?

Most abscesses are caused by bacteria entering the skin through:

- Small cuts or breaks
- Hair follicles
- Ingrown hairs
- Blocked oil glands
- Skin irritation or friction

Some infections are caused by **staph bacteria**, including **MRSA**.

What Does an Abscess Feel Like?

Symptoms may include:

- Pain or throbbing
- Swelling
- Warmth
- Redness
- Pressure under the skin
- Pus drainage

Larger abscesses may also cause:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Feeling ill

How Are Abscesses Treated?

Small or early abscesses

- Warm compresses
- Monitoring
- Sometimes antibiotics

Larger or deeper abscesses

Many require:

- **Incision & Drainage (I&D)**
- Possible antibiotics
- Wound care follow-up

Antibiotics alone may not work well if pus is trapped beneath the skin.

What Happens During Incision & Drainage?

1. The area is cleaned
2. Local anesthetic is used to numb the skin
3. A small opening is made
4. Pus is drained
5. The wound may be rinsed or packed with gauze
6. A dressing is applied

The procedure usually relieves pressure and pain quickly.

Pre-Op Instructions

(Before evaluation or drainage)

- Do not squeeze or attempt to drain the abscess at home
- Apply warm compresses if instructed
- Tell us if you:
 - Have diabetes
 - Have immune system problems
 - Take blood thinners
 - Have medication allergies
 - Have fever or rapidly spreading redness

Arrive with clean skin and avoid applying thick ointments before your visit.

Post-Op Instructions

(After drainage or treatment)

What's normal

- Mild soreness
- Continued drainage for 1–2 days
- Mild swelling or tenderness

Aftercare

- Keep the area clean and covered
- Change dressings as instructed
- Wash hands before and after touching the area
- Complete all prescribed antibiotics
- Avoid squeezing or picking

Packing care

Some abscesses require temporary gauze packing and follow-up visits.

Call the office if

- Fever develops or worsens
- Redness spreads
- Pain increases
- Drainage becomes excessive or foul-smelling
- You develop new abscesses

Can Abscesses Leave Scars?

Yes. Deeper infections may leave:

- Scars
- Dark marks
- Firm tissue changes

Early treatment may help reduce scarring.

Abscesses FAQ

What's the difference between an abscess and a boil?

A boil is a type of abscess that usually begins around a hair follicle. "Abscess" is a broader term for any pus collection under the skin.

Can I pop an abscess at home?

No. Attempting to drain it yourself can worsen infection and spread bacteria deeper.

Do all abscesses need antibiotics?

Not always. Some improve after proper drainage alone, while others need antibiotics depending on severity and risk factors.

What is MRSA?

MRSA is a type of staph bacteria resistant to some antibiotics. It commonly causes boils and abscesses.

Will the procedure hurt?

Local anesthesia is used to numb the area. You may feel pressure, but discomfort is usually manageable.

Can abscesses come back?

Yes. Some patients develop recurrent abscesses due to skin bacteria, friction, shaving, diabetes, or immune factors.

When should I seek urgent medical care?

Seek prompt evaluation if:

- Redness spreads quickly
- Fever develops
- Pain becomes severe
- Infection is near the eye or face
- You feel ill or weak