

Cellulitis



What Can I Do To Feel Better Besides Taking Antibiotics?

- You should start feeling a little better within 1–2 days of starting antibiotics. The redness and swelling may not go away right away but should gradually improve. It is normal for the redness to look slightly worse during the first couple of days due to inflammation, even if the infection is starting to improve.
- Aside from taking acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®) as needed, additional medications are usually not necessary, besides the antibiotics you have been prescribed.
- Elevating the affected limb whenever possible helps reduce swelling and promote healing. For example, if your leg is affected, try lying down and propping your leg up on pillows.
- Warm compresses, as needed, can help ease the discomfort.
- It is preferable to keep the affected area dry; consider outlining the redness with a marker so you can keep track of the progress over the next few days.

How Can I Prevent Cellulitis From Occurring Again?

- When the cellulitis resolves, keep your skin moisturized to avoid cracks that allow bacteria to enter.
- Consider keeping the heels of your feet moisturized with petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) to reduce the risk of foot infections, especially if you have diabetes.
- Treat athlete's foot if you notice scaling or itching between the toes.
- Wear properly fitting shoes and avoid walking barefoot outdoors.
- Manage conditions like diabetes and obesity as directed by your clinician, as these can increase the risk of cellulitis.
- If you have swelling in your legs, wear compression stockings and elevate your legs when possible.

What Should I Do if My Symptoms Are Not Improving?

- If your symptoms are not improving by day 3, or if at any time you experience any of the following, seek immediate in person care, preferably in an emergency department:
 - The redness or swelling is rapidly spreading
 - Blisters or black/dark skin areas are forming
 - You have a high fever, chills, or feel more ill
 - The area becomes increasingly painful or you are unable to use the affected limb
 - You feel confused or have trouble eating or drinking

AHRQ Pub. No. 26(27)-0021
October 2026

Directions for Adding Your Logo to Your Document

If you choose to add a logo to this document, you can place it in the header or footer. Below are instructions for adding a logo using Adobe Acrobat Pro. You may also use a comparable PDF editing software.

Steps:

1. Open the PDF in your Adobe PDF editing program.
2. Click on the Tools menu at the top.
3. Select "Edit PDF" from the screen.
4. Select the "Add Image" button from the top.
5. Navigate on your computer to where your logo is saved. Click Open.
6. Click on the PDF where you want the logo to appear. If needed, move the logo by clicking and dragging it to the correct location.
7. Resize the logo to fit with your document.
8. Click the save icon (at the top), or go to File menu and select Save. Make sure to save with a new name.

AHRQ Pub. No. 26(27)-0021
October 2026