

Abscess (Incision & Drainage)

An abscess is sometimes called a boil. It happens when bacteria get trapped under the skin and start to grow. Pus forms inside the abscess as the body responds to the bacteria. An abscess can happen with an insect bite, ingrown hair, blocked oil gland, pimple, cyst, or puncture wound.

Your healthcare provider has drained the pus from your abscess. If the abscess pocket was large, your healthcare provider may have put in gauze packing. Your provider will need to remove it on your next visit. He or she may also replace it at that time. You may not need antibiotics to treat a simple abscess, unless the infection is spreading into the skin around the wound (cellulitis).

The wound will take about 1 to 2 weeks to heal, depending on the size of the abscess. Healthy tissue will grow from the bottom and sides of the opening until it seals over.

Home care

These tips can help your wound heal:

- The wound may drain for the first 2 days. Cover the wound with a clean dry dressing. Change the dressing if it becomes soaked with blood or pus.
- If a gauze packing was placed inside the abscess pocket, you may be told to remove it yourself. You may do this in the shower. Once the packing is removed, you should wash the area in the shower, or clean the area as directed by your provider. Continue to do this until the skin opening has closed. Make sure you wash your hands after changing the packing or cleaning the wound.
- If you were prescribed antibiotics, take them as directed until they are all gone.
- You may use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to control pain, unless another pain medicine was prescribed. If you have liver disease or ever had a stomach ulcer, talk with your doctor before using these medicines.

Follow-up care

Follow up with your healthcare provider, or as advised. If a gauze packing was put in your wound, it should be removed in 1 to 2 days. Check your wound every day for any signs that the infection is getting worse. The signs are listed below.

When to seek medical advice

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of these occur:

- Increasing redness or swelling
- Red streaks in the skin leading away from the wound
- Increasing local pain or swelling
- Continued pus draining from the wound 2 days after treatment

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Boil returns when you are at home

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