

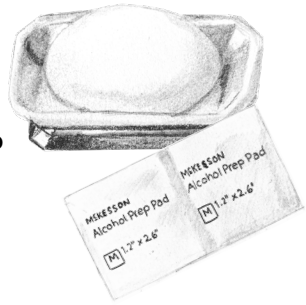
# Wound & Abscess Care

## FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

**Please Note:** This pamphlet does not constitute medical advice. If your abscess is large, extremely painful, or smells bad, it's important to seek medical attention from a professional.

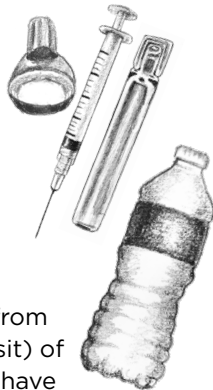
### Preventing Injection-Related Wounds

1. **Wash your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer**
2. **Wash the injection site with soap and water**



- If you don't have access to soap and water you can use an alcohol prep pad.
- If using an alcohol prep pad, make sure to wipe away from where you plan to inject. Injecting into a dirty or unwashed spot could raise the chance of infection.
- Make sure not to use the alcohol prep pad on a fresh injection wound, this will prevent the blood from clotting and delay healing.

3. **Use fresh supplies each time you inject, whenever possible.** This means a fresh cooker, new cotton, fresh syringe, and clean water. These objects all have the potential to carry bacteria.

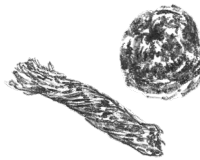


4. **Using sterile water, sterile saline, tap water, or from a sealed water bottle is best**

- An opened water bottle or water from the back (not the part where you sit) of the toilet can be used if you don't have access to sterile, sealed, or tap water.

5. **Always filter your shot and use a new filter every time**

- Filtering helps to get particles out that may cause a serious blood clot.
- Old filters and cottons still have drugs but they can introduce harmful mold and bacteria into your blood which can cause issues like cotton fever and sepsis.
- Consider eating the old cottons to still get the most of your drugs without risking infection or bacteria in your blood.



6. **The best and safest injection sites are in the arms and legs because they have the best circulation, this means**

### they'll heal faster than other sites

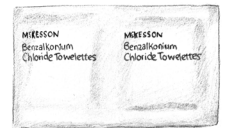
- Hands and feet are second choices because they're further away from the heart.
- Remember, each little hole takes 2-3 days to heal even super small ones.
- Slightly move the spot of injection each time so the site can heal.
- If you can switch veins too it'll help because they also take a few days to heal.
- If possible avoid your wrist, groin, neck, and arteries. There are many nerves and vessels in a small area and injecting in these areas risks serious damage, pain, and infection.

7. **If possible, avoid injecting pills**

- Pills often contain substances to bind the pill together that can cause severe damage to your veins resulting in serious health issues.

8. **If you follow these steps before everytime you inject your chances of injection-related complications are lower.**

9. **Optional** - BZK wipes can be used after injecting to clean your injection site. Triple antibiotic ointment can be gently rubbed on an abscess or infected injection site after it has closed.



### Reducing track marks

1. Use moisturizer or antibiotic creams on injection sites once they've closed or scabbed over. Aloe vera gel, cocoa butter, and vitamin E oil can help reduce track marks.
2. Creams like triple antibiotic ointment can be applied before going to sleep. The body heals when it's resting so it's the best time to use it.
3. Avoid injecting into areas with wounds. This will cause scar tissue and further damage the vein which can lead to a vein collapse in the long term.

### Missed shots

1. Don't apply creams or oils you use to treat your track

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marks or bruising until the injection wound has begun to close which usually happens a few hours after injecting.

2. Use antimicrobial soap and water to clean the wound. Do not use scented or alcohol based soaps. Avoid any alcohol-based, scented lotion, or antibiotics.
3. Use a warm water soak or a hot compress a few times a day to reduce irritation/abscess formation and increase circulation to the wound.
  - Cut socks can be used to wrap a hot compress on the wound. Hot compresses include hand warmers, warm towels. You can place uncooked rice in a clean cotton sock tying off the end and microwave it for a minute a time until it's warm but not too hot to burn your skin.
4. Make sure to keep it cleaned and covered until the draining stops.
5. If you're not able to hit, consider staying hydrated and warming up the injecting site to help veins come up. Even some light exercise can help get your veins to come up. A hot shower or a steamy bathroom can also help get your veins to pop up.

## Abscess Care

### What is an Abscess?

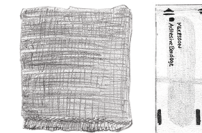
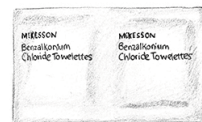


- An abscess is a sign of your immune system doing its job.
  - An abscess forms when there is an infection below the skin.
  - Your body tries to fight off the bacteria by making a pocket that fills with pus, a mix of dead tissue, white blood cells, and germs.
- Abscesses can happen after skin popping, muscling a hit, or missing a vein.
    - Abscesses usually develop at the injection site and will look like a hard, red bump. It may feel warmer than the skin nearby and will usually hurt.
    - IMing or skin-popping stimulants (like meth or cocaine) can cause an abscess.
  - Abscesses are usually due to bacteria and not because of the drug injected.

### Abscess Reminders

- Treating abscesses early can lower the chance of more serious and possibly life-threatening complications later on.
- Do not squeeze or cut an abscess open yourself! You can cut into blood vessels. Squeezing, even though it's tempting, can spread the infection into your bloodstream.
- Do apply hot compresses to help bring the infection to the surface if caring for it on your own. This will help with pain and pressure.
- Following our tips for preventing injection related wounds at the beginning of this resource can help avoid abscesses.

## How to Treat Your Abscess BEFORE It Begins to Drain

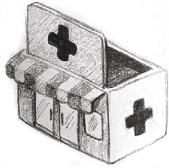


1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. DO NOT pick or squeeze the abscess to try and get the pus out.
  - Squeezing or picking the abscess will only spread the infection into your bloodstream which can cause blood poisoning and delay healing.
  - Keep it covered with a bandaid/over the counter antibiotic ointment.
3. Draw a circle around the outer edge of the swollen area.
  - If the abscess gets bigger than the circle around it in the next 24 to 48 hours, it MAY NOT get better on its own, and you should see a doctor because abscesses can be life-threatening in severe cases.
4. Soak or hold a hot compress or warm water on the abscess 3-4 times a day for 10-15 minutes at a time to reduce swelling and increase circulation to the wound.
  - It shouldn't be so hot that it burns your skin.
  - Cut socks can be used to wrap a hot compress on the wound. Hot compresses include hand warmers, warm towels, or you can place uncooked rice in a clean cotton sock tying off the end and microwave it for a minute a time until it's warm.
5. Elevate the abscess a few times a day, a good time would be while using the compress.
  - Elevation will decrease swelling and inflammation.
6. You can apply antibiotic ointment only if the abscess is not open or draining pus. Although it won't heal the abscess, antibiotic ointment can help prevent a superficial infection from spreading further.
7. Cover with a clean, dry bandage or wrap with gauze after heat and elevation.
8. Make sure to cover the abscess with clean bandages or gauze that you change often.
  - The liquid that comes out of an abscess is full of bacteria.
  - Place anything that has touched the drained fluid into a plastic bag and throw it out in the trash.
  - If the bandage or gauze gets dirty, use saline or warm water to pull off old gauze so you don't damage healing tissues, and replace it with new gauze.
  - Don't use antimicrobials like an alcohol pad or hydrogen peroxide on an abscess.
9. Over time, an abscess may develop a "head" and start to drain on its own.
  - Stop soaking or using compresses when this happens.
10. If the abscess is getting smaller than the circle you drew around it, less red, less swollen, and draining pus that doesn't smell bad and your tissues look healthy (no red streaks running up the limb), then you don't have to see a doctor. Just follow these steps and keep it clean and covered with a bandaid or gauze until it stops draining. If the site starts to change color to green, purple or black on lighter skin, or smells really bad, go to the ER immediately. You may risk more serious complications.

## How to Treat your Abscess AFTER It Has Finished Draining

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Clean the area surrounding the abscess with BZK towelette.
3. Rinse abscess with soap and water or saline.
4. Keep the abscess dry and clean.
5. Cover abscess with gauze and band-aids.
6. Air it out for about 20 minutes a day after cleaning well.
7. Repeat this twice a day until the abscess is healed.

## Go to the Doctor When



- The red bump is getting larger than the circle you drew around it, more painful, and feels hot to the touch.
- If you have a fever, this could be a sign that the abscess has spread bacteria to a larger part of your skin, or even into your other organs including your heart.
- Your abscess is over a major artery (where you can feel a pulse).
- There are red streaks coming from the site of the infection.
- The abscess isn't getting any better after 5-7 days.
- Your immune system is already weakened by HIV/AIDS, diabetes, cancer, etc.

## Go to the ER When

- You have chest pains, chills, and/or a fever above 100.5°F, feel like you may pass out (a sign of low blood pressure or infection), especially if you have any health conditions that might make your body more sensitive to infection. This could mean your wound or abscess has complications and the infection has spread to your heart or blood system.
- Your skin around the infection turns dark or redness around the infection spreads quickly. This could be necrotizing fasciitis aka "flesh eating disease".
- You develop vision problems or droopy eyelids, have difficulty breathing, talking, swallowing, or have a sore throat 1-2 days AFTER injecting. This could be wound botulism. It is a rare but life threatening and usually associated with Black Tar use.
- You find an abscess in a place you never injected.

## A NOTE ON ANTIBIOTICS

- Many people ask when or if they need antibiotics. If you are otherwise healthy and the abscess is <2 cm (the size of a penny or bottle cap), you might not need antibiotics. You may still need to go to the doctor for them to perform an incision and drainage. If you have a fever, multiple abscesses, have had endocarditis, have HIV, diabetes or are immunocompromised, you will probably need antibiotics.
- If you are prescribed antibiotics, make sure you take all

of them, even if you feel better. Do not share antibiotics - what works for you may not work for someone else. A typical duration of antibiotics ranges from 7 to 14 days depending on the size and severity and other health conditions. If it is NOT improving after 24-48 hours on antibiotics, you might not have a strong enough antibiotic to cover the right bacteria and need to go see a doctor again. Sometimes people need intravenous antibiotics if an infection is very deep and serious.

## Types of Injection-Related Complications that Require Medical Attention

**If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, please seek medical attention or call 911.**

You can help prevent these by, when possible, using fresh works every time, never sharing your works, and rotating your injection sites. These are listed here because there is little to nothing you can do at home for these potentially life-threatening conditions if left untreated.

### Most Common

## Cellulitis

- Cellulitis happens when bacteria enters the skin.
- Symptoms include swollen, red, hot, and tender skin on the injection site. Skin can appear like the skin of an orange, tough and textured.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention as soon as possible.**

## MRSA/Staph/Strep

- MRSA/Staph/Strep most often happens when works are shared. It is very contagious.
- Symptoms include boils and oozing blisters. In rare cases, it can cause fever, joint, and muscle pain.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**

## Endocarditis

- Endocarditis is an inflammation in your heart caused by bacteria.
- Symptoms include fever, chills, fatigue, aches, night sweats, difficulty breathing, paleness, swelling of feet, cough, weight loss, and bloody urine. Heart failure and sepsis can also happen in extreme cases.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**

## Sepsis (blood poisoning)

- Sepsis happens when germs get into your blood and start growing.
- Symptoms include fever, confusion, shortness of breath, coldness, and shivering. Early treatment is important.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**

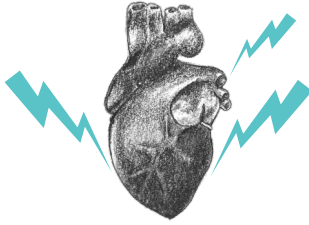
## Possible but not likely

### Osteomyelitis

- Osteomyelitis is an infection in a bone that often happens through the blood.
- Symptoms include swelling, redness, pain, fever, fatigue and chills.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**

### Heart attack

- Heart attacks happen when an artery supplying your heart is blocked.
- Symptoms include trouble breathing, arm, neck, or chest pain, extreme fatigue. Heart attack can come with full recovery, permanent disability, or death.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**



### Stroke

- A stroke happens when the blood supply to your brain is blocked.
- Symptoms include sudden dizziness or confusion, loss of consciousness (passing out), face drooping on one side of the face. Stroke can come with full recovery, permanent disability, or death.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**

## Extremely Rare but Possible

### Necrotizing Fasciitis (“flesh eating disease”)

- Necrotizing Fasciitis is an infection that causes the death of skin tissue.
- Symptoms include black (purple in darker skin) or darkened color on injection site, redness spreading fast (draw an outline around redness on skin with an ink pen to measure progress), and feeling very sick, having a fever, or confusion.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**

### Wound Botulism

- Wound botulism is caused by a bacteria that produces a toxin on the injection site that eventually stops your breathing by paralyzing your muscles.
- Symptoms include droopy eyelids, blurred or double vision, and a dry, sore throat which may progress into difficulty speaking and swallowing, a weakness

of the neck, arms, and legs, and difficulty breathing. If untreated, wound botulism will cause death by paralyzing the muscles used for breathing. Early treatment is important.

- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**

### Deep Vein Thrombosis

- Deep vein thrombosis happens when a blood clot forms in a vein.
- Symptoms include heat, pain, swelling, or redness near the injection site. Deep vein thrombosis can lead to stroke or heart attack if not treated.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**

### Tetanus (“Lockjaw”)

- Tetanus happens when a bacteria enters your skin that may affect your nerves.
  - A tetanus vaccine can prevent getting tetanus.
- Symptoms include painful muscle contractions in the jaw and neck. It can also affect your breathing, eventually causing death.
- If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, **seek medical attention immediately.**
- A tetanus vaccine can prevent getting tetanus.

### Other reasons to immediately seek medical attention

- High fever of 100.1 or more
- You find an abscess in a place you never injected
- Extreme chills and fatigue

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