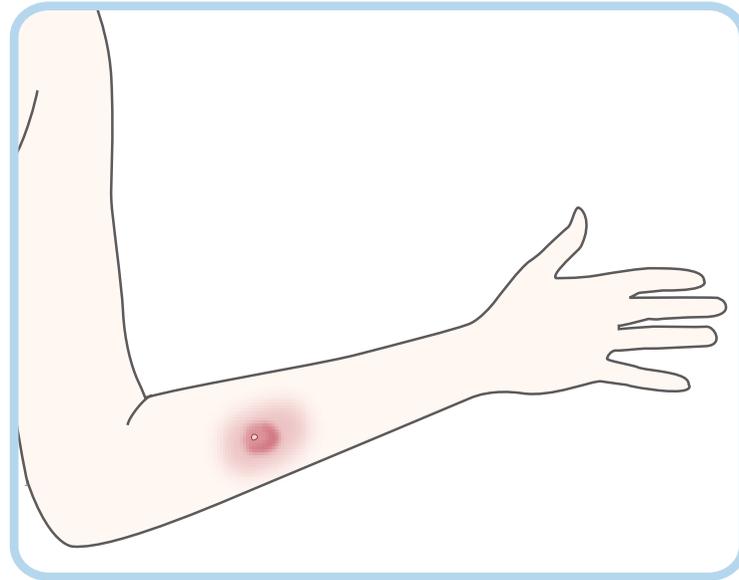


# Skin Abscess / Wound Care



 Office d'éducation des patients du CUSM  
MUHC Patient Education Office



This material is also available on the  
MUHC Health Education Collection (<http://infotheque.muhc.ca/>)  
MUHC Patient Education Office ([www.muhcpatienteducation.ca](http://www.muhcpatienteducation.ca)).

This material was developed by the McGill  
University Health Centre Emergency Department.

## What is wrong?

You have an abscess which is an infection under your skin with a collection of pus. An abscess is caused by bacteria (germs). The infection usually does not go away with medication alone (antibiotics). The pus has to be drained for the abscess to heal. This is done by making a small cut in the skin and putting in a packing (a small piece of gauze in the opening) with a bandage over it.

## What should I do at home?

The bandage **over** the abscess:

- ▶ Keep the bandage clean and dry.
- ▶ Change the bandage the next day or when instructed. If you cannot do it yourself, ask someone to do it for you.

To change the bandage:

- ▶ Wash your hands before to make sure you do not make the infection worse.
- ▶ Remove the dressing carefully and put it in a plastic bag before you throw it away.
- ▶ Very gently wash the area with lukewarm water and mild soap. Let the area dry before putting another dressing. If it is a rectal abscess, you can use a sitz bath.
- ▶ Redo the dressing in the same way as in the hospital with the bandages you were given or asked to get from a pharmacy.
- ▶ Wash your hands after to make sure you do not spread the infection.

## What should I do at home? (cont.)

The packing **inside** the abscess:

- ▶ **Do not pull or remove the packing yourself.** It is important that it stays inside for the area to heal completely.
- ▶ The doctor will send you to a CLSC so a nurse can change the packing inside the wound and make sure the wound is healing properly.

If you are given a prescription for antibiotics, take them as directed. It is very important to finish all the pills even if you're feeling better.

Avoid any ointments or creams unless advised by your doctor.

## When am I going to feel better?

The pain will improve after the drainage. The skin will usually take 2 to 3 weeks to heal.

## Should I see another doctor?

You should let your family doctor know of your situation. In certain cases the Emergency doctor will refer you to a specialist.

## When should I come back to the Emergency Department?

**You should return right away:**

- ▶ The redness and swelling is spreading around the abscess.
- ▶ If you have a fever above 38°C / 100.4°F.
- ▶ You develop muscle, joint or body aches all over.