



Boils are common, but usually minor, skin problems. Most often, they occur in areas where the skin becomes chaffed and where there are hair follicles. This includes the neck, buttocks, armpits, and genitals. A boil can range in size from that of a pea to a ping pong ball.

Boils

Signs & Symptoms

- A round or cone-shaped lump or pimple that is red, tender, painful, or throbs.
- Pus may be visible under the skin's surface after several days.
- The boil usually bursts open on its own after 10 to 14 days.



Causes

Boils are caused when a hair follicle or oil gland becomes infected with *staph* bacteria. Boils can be very contagious. Risk factors that make them more likely to occur include:

- Poor hygiene.
- Overuse of corticosteroid medicine.
- Diabetes.
- Short, curly hair that has a tendency to grow back down into the skin.

Treatment

Self-care treats boils. If this is not enough, your doctor may need to lance and drain the boil and prescribe an antibiotic.

Questions to Ask

With a boil, do you have any of these problems?

- **Fever.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- Red streaks on the skin near the boil.
- Pain that limits normal activity.
- Diabetes.



NO

Flowchart continued on next page



Boils, Continued

Do any of these problems occur?

- Many boils don't drain or heal.
- A boil is on the spine, lip, nose, ear, or eye.
- A boil is on the genitals, pelvis, hand, foot, or face.

YES



NO

Did boils occur after taking antibiotics?

YES



NO

After using self-care for 3 or more days, do any of these problems occur?

- A boil grows larger.
- New boils occur.
- You get no relief from self-care.

YES



NO

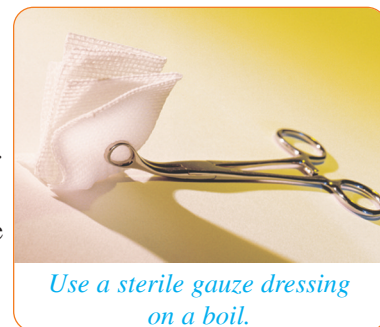


Self-Care / Prevention

- Don't scratch, squeeze, or lance boils.
- Put a hot water bottle over a damp washcloth and place it on the boil.
- Soak in a warm tub. Use an antibacterial soap. If boil is ready to burst open, take warm showers instead.

- Take an over-the-counter medicine for pain and swelling as directed.
- Wash your hands after contact with a boil. Keep clothing and other items that were in contact with the boil away from others.

- Once the boil begins to drain, keep it dry and clean. Loosely cover the boil with a sterile gauze dressing. Use first-aid tape to keep it in place. Replace the dressing if it gets moist.



Use a sterile gauze dressing on a boil.

- Wash bed linens, towels, and clothing in hot water. Do not share towels, sports equipment, etc.
- Don't wear tight-fitting clothes over a boil.



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