Skin Abscess

What is a skin abscess?
A skin abscess [AB-ses] is a bump that appears on or just below the skin. It’s usually full of pus or fluid. A boil is a type of skin abscess.

What causes it?
A skin abscess can be caused by these things:
• Insect bites or stings
• Puncture wounds
• Germs inside a hair follicle (where the hair grows out of the skin)
• Unclean needle injections

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms most often include these things near the affected area of the skin:
• Swelling
• Pain
• Redness or changes in color

How is it diagnosed?
A skin abscess is diagnosed after your healthcare provider knows your symptoms and looks at the affected area.

What are possible problems?
A skin abscess that isn’t treated can lead to a more serious infection that can spread. The infection can cause a fever and chills, and make you feel sicker.

How is it treated?
Your healthcare provider can treat a skin abscess by:
\( \square \) Draining the pus or fluid. After numbing the area, your healthcare provider may use a needle or scalpel (small blade) to open the area and allow it to drain. It’s very important to have this done in a healthcare clinic or medical office. Your healthcare provider can do it using the safest method and sterile tools.
\( \square \) Packing the wound with sterile gauze (bandaging) if it’s deep.
\( \square \) Regularly cleaning the wound and changing the bandage until the skin is healed.
\( \square \) Prescribing antibiotic medicine to stop the infection. Your healthcare provider may test a sample of the fluid to know what germ caused the skin abscess. Be sure to take the antibiotic medicine until it’s all gone so the infection doesn’t get worse or come back.

When should I call a doctor?
Contact your doctor if you have:
• A fever
• Chills
• Redness spreading near the abscess
• Pain or swelling near the abscess that’s getting worse
Questions for my doctor:


