

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:

- 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.
- Packing the wound with sterile gauze** (bandaging) if it's deep.
- Regularly cleaning the wound and changing the bandage** until the skin is healed.
- 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

