

Leg ulcer infection: antimicrobial prescribing

Information for the public

Published: 11 February 2020

www.nice.org.uk

Infected leg ulcer: do I need antibiotics?

A leg ulcer is a sore on the leg, which is usually slow to heal. It can develop from a small cut or injury and is more likely if high blood pressure has damaged blood vessels in the legs. Leg ulcers sometimes get infected, and become red and hot, swollen and painful. The infection can also cause a fever.

Using antibiotics when they are not needed means they may not work as well in the future. This is a serious health risk, so NICE has written advice about when to offer antibiotics for some common conditions, including leg ulcer infections.

You should only be offered antibiotics for a leg ulcer if you have signs of an infection. A leg ulcer infection is caused by bacteria and should be treated with antibiotics. But antibiotics don't help healing if the ulcer is not infected.

Your infection should start to improve within 2 to 3 days of starting antibiotics. You should see your doctor if it hasn't improved, if your symptoms suddenly get worse at any time (including if the infection continues to spread) or if you are in severe pain or feeling very unwell. They may refer you to hospital if you have signs of a more serious condition.

Your skin may take some time to return to normal after you have finished taking the course of antibiotics.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your health professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your health professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about:

- [leg ulcers](#) and
- [antibiotics](#).

We have also written information on [why antibiotics should be used wisely](#).

We wrote this guideline with health professionals and members of the public. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

ISBN: 978-1-4731-3679-3