

A boil is an infection of a hair follicle

What to look for

- The first stage of a boil is a painful swollen lump filled with pus, usually on the face, neck, buttocks, armpits.
- A clump of boils is called a carbuncle; a boil on the eyelid is a sty.

A boil may look like a bad pimple but in fact is the result of an infection that has invaded a blocked hair follicle. At the start a boil is red and tender; after a week pus is visible under the skin, causing the boil to become a white colour. The boil can become quite swollen and painful before the skin breaks, the pus drains, and the sore clears.

Causes

The staph bacteria that cause boils typically enter the body through cuts, scratches, and other breaks in the skin. They can be transmitted from person to person and can live on us all the time. Immune Problems; diabetes; hygiene ; exposure to certain industrial chemicals; overuse of corticosteroids; and a poor lifestyle, or nutrition are all potential causes of boils.

Traditional Treatment

Most boils can be treated at home simply by washing the infected area with antibacterial soap, and applying a hot washer or compress which will help bring the boil to a head. Over-the-counter topical antibiotics are also effective in limiting the spread of bacterial infection.

Do not squeeze as this can spread the infection. When they burst, wash the area gently until no more pus appears, then cover with a bandaid to avoid reinfection. Be sure to wash your hands thoroughly, and disinfect towels.

If the pain is severe, or if a boil refuses to pop, it may be lanced by a doctor.

Alternative/Natural Treatments

Boils have plagued humans for centuries, and humans have countered with all sorts of remedies. Use caution when trying alternative remedies on your skin, because the wrong treatment may actually aggravate an infection.

Chinese Herbs - Chinese herbal medicine focuses on reducing heat in the body, which is thought to cause boils. Try drinking tea made from dandelion, chrysanthemum flower or violet.

Herbal Therapies - For inflammation, an over-the-counter ointment made with marsh mallow, a poultice of slippery elm, and a tincture of blue flag or myrrh .

Aromatherapy - To fight infection, apply tea tree oil to the boil four to six times a day. Essential oils of bergamot, lavender, chamomile, and sage are also recommended for their antibacterial properties. Goldenseal mixed with distilled witch hazel to use as a wash.

Homoeopathy - If a boil comes up suddenly and is very red and hot, Belladonna three to four times daily may slow or halt the infection. For very painful boils try Hepar sulphuris, and for those that heal slowly use Silica, in the same potency and frequency.

Dietary Considerations

Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, and eat more garlic for its antiseptic properties, and foods high in zinc to enhance the immune system. You can accomplish this through your diet, or you can take tablets.

At-Home Remedies

- a warm Epsom salt bath will help draw the pus out of a boil.
- wash with antibacterial soaps if boils appear on the face.
- do not pop boils as it can worsen the infection and worsen the scarring.

Prevention

- Nicks and breaks in the skin that are left untreated can cause boils as can sharing towels etc and contact sports. So treat these small cut immediately.

When to seek further professional advice

- the boil causes excessive pain; you may want a doctor to lance and drain it.
- the inflammation is accompanied by a fever, or the boil appears on your lip, nose, cheeks, forehead, or spine;
- You have a boil that is very tender, particularly if it has red lines radiating from it, or if you have fever and chills; the infection may have spread.

- you are diabetic and start to get boils; this can indicate that your blood sugar level is too high - seek medical advice.