



BOILS

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Boils (also known as **furuncles** or **carbuncles**) are tender, red lumps that may ooze pus. A single boil may be due to a ruptured cyst or a small abscess. Most boils can be treated by incision and drainage, a minor surgical procedure to open the boil and to drain the pus. Oral antibiotics are usually not needed.

Some people have multiple or recurrent boils, which are usually due to Staph infections. The bacteria are picked up somewhere and then live on the skin, crowding out the normal, harmless bacteria we all carry. The source may be a family member, a pet or just appear 'out of the blue.'

In these cases antibiotics are taken by mouth for 10 or 14 days. In stubborn cases two oral antibiotics plus topical antibiotic ointments are usually required to eliminate the bacteria.

Gentle heat, provided by a moist, warm washcloth held over the area for 20 minutes three times a day, speeds up the healing process. Putting antibiotic ointment (Neosporin, Bacitracin, Iodine or Polysporin) on the boil will not cure it because the medicine does not penetrate into the infected skin. Covering the boil with a Band-Aid will keep the germs from spreading.

A milder version of boils is **folliculitis**. This is an infection of hair follicles, usually with Staph bacteria. These often itch more than hurt. The appearance is similar to acne pustules.

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