

BOILS (FURUNCLES)

Boils are painful swellings in the skin caused by an infection with a staph germ (bacteria). The bacteria enter the skin from the outside usually through a hair opening. Boils begin as red tender swellings. Later on the infection produces pus which may ooze out through the skin. The source of the staph bacteria is usually not known. Most boils appear "out of the blue". Sometimes boils develop after exposure to someone with boils or another skin infection. There are some patients who have recurring boils. When this occurs tests may be done to determine if there is a reason for these recurrences.

Antibiotics taken by mouth are the best treatment for boils. The specific antibiotic which you take will be determined based on the type of boil you have and any antibiotic allergies. If pus has formed, minor surgery to open the boil and drain the pus may be needed. Gentle soaking with a lukewarm washcloth held close to the skin for 10 minutes twice a day may also aid in healing if the area is quite inflamed .

A topical antibiotic ointment can be applied to the boil after the soaking two times a day. Normally I recommend polysporin ointment to be used for this purpose. A Band-Aid can then be used to cover the area especially if it would otherwise become inflamed due to rubbing from the clothing.

Fortunately boils respond rapidly to treatment and do not usually recur. If you have any other questions about this condition, please do not hesitate to ask before you leave the office.