

FURUNCLES

Boils

CATEGORY:

Follicular disorder / Infections

LOOKS LIKE:

Swollen lump/s under the skin; red, purple, or brown; often with a white or yellow centre ('head') filled with pus

FEELS LIKE:

Can be painful and warm to touch

OUTLOOK:

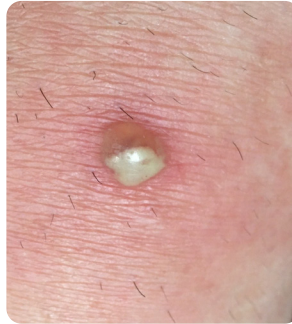
Often go away on their own; may require drainage or antibiotics if severe

LOCATION:

Anywhere on the body; most common in hairy or sweaty areas like armpits, buttocks, thighs, groin



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE —



A boil on the arm with visible pus



A boil in the groin with surrounding redness from spreading skin infection (cellulitis)



A boil on the nose



Multiple boils on the leg



A boil on the buttock



A boil on the leg that is about to burst

What is it?

A boil (also known as a furuncle) is a painful, pus-filled spot or lump under the skin. It occurs as the result of a bacterial infection of a hair follicle.

Boils are common and often go away with no treatment, or simple at-home measures.

While boils themselves are not contagious, the bacteria that cause them can sometimes spread between people eg, via shared razors or towels that may get pus on them. Boils are not cancerous.

Boils

CAUSES —

Boils can occur in anyone. They are often caused by a type of **bacteria** called ***Staphylococcus aureus*** which can be naturally found on the surface of the skin without causing harm. However, if these bacteria enter the skin through a small cut or damaged hair follicle, it may cause an infection.

You might be more prone to boils if you:

- Have **broken skin**, for example from cuts, shaving, or friction (eg, tight clothing)
- Are overweight
- Smoke
- Have a weakened immune system (eg, due to diabetes or certain medications)
- Share personal items such as razors.

SYMPTOMS —

You may notice:

- A swollen **lump under the skin** — red, purple, or brown, depending on skin tone
- A white or yellow centre ('head') filled with **pus** that will eventually burst and drain
- The area may be **painful** and feel **warm**.

Boils are more common in hairy or sweaty areas such as the armpits, thighs, buttocks, or groin.

COMPLICATIONS —

Though many boils heal without any problems, they can sometimes progress to **more serious infections**, such as:

- An **abscess** — larger/deeper collection of pus
- A **carbuncle** — cluster of connected boils
- **Cellulitis** — spread of infection to nearby skin and tissues; can make you feverish and unwell.

Other complications can include:

- **Scarring**
- **Recurrent boils** — when boils come back, or new ones keep coming up.

DIAGNOSIS —

A healthcare professional can often identify a boil based on how it looks. In some cases, a **swab** of the pus may be taken to identify the bacteria, especially if the boil will not heal, keeps returning, or if there are signs of a more serious infection.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION —

Many boils will **go away without treatment**.

Self-care measures:

- Wet a clean cloth with warm water and apply to the boil for 10 minutes, several times a day – this can help it come to a head, drain, and ease the pain
- Keep the area clean & consider covering it with a dressing if it starts to drain
- Avoid squeezing and popping the boil.

If the boil is large, very painful, or not healing, seek medical advice. You may need an **incision and drainage** (draining of pus using proper equipment by a healthcare professional) or treatment with **antibiotics** (eg, flucloxacillin pills) to help clear the infection.

Prevention tips to help stop boils coming back:

- Wash hands regularly and bathe or shower daily
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels and razors
- If you often get boils in skin folds, wearing loose, breathable clothing and losing weight (if overweight) may help
- Use antiseptic or antibacterial soap/body wash if you get recurrent boils.

OUTCOME —

Most boils heal within a few weeks with proper care. Once the pus is drained, the boil usually improves quickly.

Some people experience problems with recurrent boils which may need further medical input.



<https://dermnetnz.org/topics/boil>