

Bone Infection

What is a bone infection?

Most wound infections start in skin, fat and muscle. If the infection goes deeper, it can reach the bone. Infection in the bone is called **osteomyelitis**.

Can my wound heal if I have this infection?

For a wound to heal, bone infection must be cured. Bone infection is harder to cure than other types of infection. With treatment, most bone infections can be cured and the wound healed.

How can I tell if I have a bone infection?

Sometimes doctors can see a bone infection in X-rays. A bone scan or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) may be able to see bone infections that are not seen on X-rays.

Your doctor may do surgery to remove a piece of bone to test it for infection. Doctors will look at this bone sample under a microscope to see if it looks infected. The lab will also test it to see if there are bacteria (germs) in the bone.

Will the infection make my bone weak?

Infected bone becomes soft. However, once the infection is cured, the bone will become hard again. For most patients, the infection will not affect their ability to walk and go about daily activities.

How is it treated?

There are two ways to treat bone infection: long-term antibiotics and removing the bone through surgery. Your doctor will discuss your options with you.

Antibiotics kill the bacteria in the bone. You will need six weeks of antibiotics because a bone infection is hard to cure. Most patients get the antibiotics through an intravenous (IV) line.

You do not need to stay in the hospital for all this time. If you or a family member can set up the IV solution, then you can get IV antibiotics at home. In this case, a visiting nurse will come to your house to teach you how to set everything up. Other patients will spend the six weeks in a nursing home. The nursing home staff will give you the antibiotics, and you and your family do not need to do it.

Surgery can remove bone that is unhealthy and contains bacteria. Most of the time, removing the bone does not change your ability to go about your daily activities.

Will I have any pain?

Some patients have pain from bone infections and some do not. Pain can be treated.

What do I do if I have a question?

If you are confused or have a question about your bone infection, please call us at 212.932.4325, at any time. You can also find information at our website: www.ColumbiaWoundHealing.org.

This information is brief and general. It should not be the only source of your information on this health care topic. It is not to be used or relied on for diagnosis or treatment. It does not take the place of instructions from your doctor. Talk to your health care providers before making a health care decision.