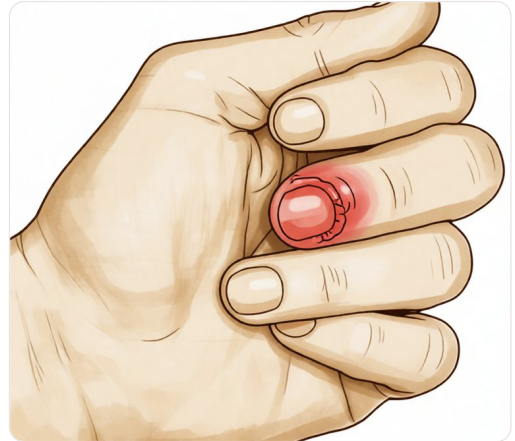


# Hand Infections

A hand with cellulitis — a soft-tissue infection presenting with redness, swelling and warmth.

Kieran Hirpara 4.0



## What you're feeling

You may notice your hand is swollen, red, and warm to the touch. The pain often starts suddenly and gets worse as the infection grows. It can feel like a deep ache or a throbbing sensation that keeps you awake at night. Simple movements like making a fist or straightening your fingers become very difficult and painful.

Everyday tasks that used to be easy now feel hard. You might struggle to reach behind your back to fasten a bra or tuck in your shirt. Lifting even a light object, like a coffee cup, can cause sharp pain. Your surgeon will likely need to perform an incision and drainage to remove the infection. This surgery is combined with antibiotics to fight the specific bacteria causing the problem.

The pain may flare up after you use your hand or when you wake up in the morning. You might find it hard to sleep on the side of the affected hand. Your surgeon will tailor your antibiotic therapy to match the severity of your infection. This careful treatment plan helps you recover and return to your normal daily activities.

## What's actually happening

When you get an acute hand infection, bacteria enter your tissues and start multiplying. This triggers your body's defense system, causing swelling, redness, and pain. The infection creates pressure inside the tight spaces of your hand, which can damage the surrounding structures if not treated quickly.

To fix this, your surgeon performs a procedure called incision and drainage. This involves making a small cut to open the infected area and let the pus drain out. This step is essential because antibiotics alone cannot reach the infection effectively while it is trapped inside.

After the drainage, you will also need antibiotic therapy. These medicines are chosen specifically for the type of bacteria causing your infection and how severe it is. Your surgeon tailors this treatment to match your specific needs to ensure the infection clears up completely.

## What we can do about it

---

For mild symptoms, you can try resting your hand and doing gentle exercises to keep it moving. Your physiotherapist will guide you through these movements to reduce stiffness and improve strength. You should give this approach a few weeks to see if it helps your pain and function.

If rest is not enough, your surgeon may recommend pain medication and anti-inflammatories to help you feel better. These medicines work by reducing swelling and blocking pain signals in your hand. In some cases, your surgeon might suggest an injection of cortisone or hyaluronic acid to calm the inflammation further. These injections can provide relief that lasts for several months, depending on how your body responds.

Surgery is considered when conservative care has reached its limit and the infection does not improve. Your surgeon will perform an incision and drainage to remove the infection and prescribe antibiotics tailored to the specific germ causing it. This combination of surgical intervention and appropriate antibiotic therapy is necessary to clear the infection effectively.

## When to see someone

---

See your GP if you have persistent pain that does not improve with rest. Ask for a specialist review if you notice weakness or instability in your hand. Seek help if your hand locks or gives way. Contact your surgeon if symptoms interfere with your sleep or work. Get urgent care if you experience a sudden worsening of your condition. Treatment for acute hand infections usually requires a combination of surgical intervention, known as incision and drainage, and antibiotics tailored to your specific infection.