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Folliculitis

Folliculitis is inflammation of one or more hair follicles. It can occur anywhere on the skin.

Causes

Folliculitis starts when hair follicles are damaged or when the follicle is blocked. For example, this may occur from rubbing against clothing or shaving. Most of the time, the damaged follicles become infected with staphylococci (staph) bacteria.

Barber's itch is a staph infection of the hair follicles in the beard area, usually the upper lip. Shaving makes it worse. Tinea barbae is similar to barber's itch, but the infection is caused by a fungus.

Pseudofolliculitis barbae is a disorder that occurs mainly in African American men. If curly beard hairs are cut too short, they may curve back into the skin and cause inflammation.

Folliculitis can affect people of all ages.

Symptoms

Common symptoms include a rash, itching, and pimples or pustules near a hair follicle in the neck, groin, or genital area. The pimples may crust over.

Exams and Tests

Your health care provider can diagnose this condition by looking at your skin. Lab tests may show which bacteria or fungus is causing the infection.

Treatment

Warm, moist compresses may help drain the affected follicles.

Treatment may include antibiotics applied to the skin or taken by mouth, or an antifungal medicine.

Outlook (Prognosis)

Folliculitis often responds well to treatment, but it may come back.

Possible Complications

Folliculitis may return or spread to other body areas.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Apply home treatment and contact your provider if your symptoms:

- Come back often
- Get worse
- Last longer than 2 or 3 days

Prevention

To prevent further damage to the hair follicles and infection:

- Reduce friction from clothing.
- Avoid shaving the area, if possible. If shaving is necessary, use a clean, new razor blade or an electric razor each time.
- Keep the area clean.
- Avoid contaminated clothing and washcloths.

Alternative Names

Pseudofolliculitis barbae; Tinea barbae; Barber's itch

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