

Boils ^[1]

Alice,

I have heard that boils can be caused by a mineral or vitamin deficiency. Is this true? Secondly, I have had a boil for approximately six years. It will go away for a few months but soon return. I've tried a variety of drawing salves and these seem to help, but only temporarily. What should I do?

? Plagued

Answer

Dear Plagued,

Even biblical texts make reference to the plague of boils! A boil (also called a furuncle) is an inflamed, pus-filled area of the skin usually caused by an infection with *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria. While they may appear solo, a tight grouping of boils that connect under the skin, called a carbuncle, can also occur. These bothersome bumps are usually found on the back of the neck and in the armpit, groin, and other moist, high friction areas of the body. No direct connection exists between mineral or vitamin deficiency and the formation of boils; however, having an adequate supply of vitamins and minerals does keep your vital body functions in general good working order, promoting a stronger immune system to fight bacterial infections.

A boil appears initially as a red, painful lump that eventually swells, fills with pus, and has a yellowish tip. They can vary in size ? with some getting to the size of a baseball ? and will typically rupture on their own. Carbuncles may look similar, but the infection causing the bump is often more severe and more likely to cause scarring. Certain folks are at a higher risk for boils and carbuncles, including those who are in contact with others with an active staph infection and those with a compromised ability to fight off infection, such as people living with diabetes or other skin conditions.

If your boil isn't too big, you likely can treat it on your own. Applying warm compresses on the affected area to reduce discomfort, encourage draining, and promote healing. Thoroughly washing your hands and laundering any towels or clothing that come in contact with the drained boil(s) is also recommended. Though it may be tempting to employ a little D-I-Y (do-it-yourself) here, squeezing or bursting a boil on your own may cause the infection to spread or make it worse. Because you do mention that it recurs though, getting a health care provider involved may be wise. They may prescribe an antibiotic or may open up the boil with a sterile needle to drain the pus from the site and collect a sample for testing. Doing the latter may be

especially useful to determine an effective treatment, as some bacterial strains that cause boils have become resistant to certain antibiotics.

When all is said and done, you may be looking forward to preventing future boils from appearing. Generally, [adequate handwashing](#) [2], cleaning any wounds (so bacteria can't find an easy way into the body), and keeping personal items personal may help keep the bacterial culprit at bay ? and in turn, any potential boils. With proper care and hygiene, many folks can prevent boils from reaching biblical proportions!

Alice!

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