Armpit staph!!! [1]

Dear Alice,

I read the article regarding staph... but I seem to get these places in my armpits whenever I shave. I went to the doctor and they told me it was staph. What should I do... I can't stop shaving! I've tried throwing the razor away when I use it only once and the problem is still there? What should I do????

Answer

Dear Reader,

Stopping staphylococcus aureus (staph [2]) in its tracks can be a challenge, especially when the infection comes back again and again. Shaving may be exacerbating the issue in a couple of ways, whether by making it easier for the infection to spread or by not allowing enough time for your body to heal. In addition to having open cuts or sores (even if you can’t see them), sharing personal items, being in close contact with a person with staph (such as contact sports), and having a weakened immune system are some other methods of contracting a staph infection. Luckily, there are a handful of strategies you can use that may help; if your infection keeps popping up after you’ve tried a few, it may be wise for you to talk with your health care provider to investigate the issue further.

You’ve suggested that shaving could be the culprit behind your staph infection. It’s possible that even the gentlest shave can create micro cuts on the skin, allowing residual skin surface staph to get inside your body. Are you concerned about the appearance of fuzz under your arms? Armpit shaving is generally done for cosmetic reasons; there isn’t much evidence to suggest that shaving one’s armpits is more hygienic. What if you wore shirts that didn’t reveal the pits for a while? Giving yourself a good long break from shaving would allow your skin to fully heal and give your body plenty of time to kill off all the staph. In addition to taking a break from shaving, here are a few more ideas that might help the situation (and potentially prevent it in the future):

- With staph, proper hygiene is the best prevention and the best cure. If you have recurrent staph infections, try bathing more often [3]. If you currently shower once a day, try increasing to two showers per day and see if that helps.
- Don’t forget your hands! Thorough handwashing [4] with soap and water is also a great prevention method.
- What type of soap are you using? How about trying an anti-bacterial or deodorant soap.
They can be harsh on the skin, so use lotion right when you get out of the shower.

- Try changing up your deodorant. It may be that you’re experiencing irritation from that particular brand or type of deodorant.
- Staph is sometimes caused by skin staying moist and not having room to "breathe". If you wear tight shirts that don’t allow much opportunity for your armpit to ?air out?, consider wearing looser clothing or sleeveless tops if the weather allows.
- Avoid hot tubs, hot springs, and whirlpools until the infection seems to be completely healed as they tend to be breeding ground for bacteria.
- Avoid scratching the irritated area, as this keeps the skin open, allowing for the infection to spread further.
- Clean and bandage cuts and scrapes, and avoid being in contact with other people’s wounds and bandages.
- Avoid sharing towels, clothing, razors, deodorant, soap, makeup, or any other hygiene items with others in your household or residence hall.
- While the infection is present, try drying your armpits with a different towel than the rest of your body. Or, when you get out of the shower dry your armpits with paper towels.
- Sometimes, ingrown hairs can become infected. Have you noticed whether or not you have ingrown hairs in your armpits? If so, try wearing looser clothing and varying the type of razor and shaving cream or shave gel you are using.

As you may have already read, staph may cause both common and serious infections, such as folliculitis, cellulitis, staphylococcal scalded skin syndrome, bacteremia, and methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) [5]. While some mild staph infections can heal on their own, the more serious ones (such as MRSA) can really take a toll on your body and may even be life-threatening. If your health care provider has confirmed that you have staph and strategies listed above don’t bring you relief, it may be a good idea to talk with your provider to rule out any other underlying issues.

Take care,

Alice!

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Published date:
Oct 21, 2011
Last reviewed on:
Jul 07, 2017