Snakebite with consequences

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When I entered one of my snake rooms for the routine chores one Saturday morning, I had no idea what was about to happen there pretty soon.

As usual I was doing my work in a casual (but professional) way, until I reached the cage of my pair of Jungle Carpet Pythons (Morelia spilota cheynei). While I was cleaning out some faeces in said cage, the female (about 130 cm long) who was sitting in the water dish at that time, shot forward and gripped my left wrist.

It was by no means a defensive action. The snake had just mistaken my hand for prey, and so it didn't just bite as hard as it could, but it also immediately tried to strangle my wrist.

Of course this made the whole incident a lot more painful for me.

I want by no means to encourage the opinion these snakes were aggressive or snappy, but I would like to point out that this snake is particularly mild mannered, just always very hungry...and in this case slightly mistaken.

Well, this wasn't the first time that I was bitten by a snake, and so I freed myself of the animal, cleaned the wound and put a nice and large band-aid on it (see photo 1, the wound – and some “whitish” remains of the band aid).

About 5 days later I noticed a slightly aching spot on my left inner upper arm, but thought that I must have bumped into something while working, without really noticing it, and decided to ignore it.

Another 3-4 days later a slightly red and painful stripe ran from my chewed wrist to the crook of my arm.

As the self-appointed expert in medicine that I am, I came to the conclusion that it might be a broken off tooth irritating a nerve, and that it would surely grow out again some day... As usual I didn’t pay too much attention to these slight irregularities and continued with my daily life.

After yet another 3-4 days this annoying thing got into its next stage. I couldn’t ignore the fact that the slightly red stripe was now running up to the armpit and had become extremely painful. Like I always do, I continued my very successful „self-therapy“ of largely ignoring things - much to the dislike of my totally hysterical (that's what I thought at that point) family, which wanted me at the doctor's office immediately.
But when I woke up on a Thursday morning (about 14 days after the bite) to find a severe irritation of the skin on my left inner upper arm (see photo 2) even I got a little bit nervous and went to see the family doctor.

After showing him my left arm and telling him about the incident that caused the trouble, his diagnosis came amazingly fast: *Lymphangitis*. That’s an inflammation of the lymph channel, caused by bacteria, most often *streptococi*. These are generally found on the human skin, and are nothing to be concerned about. The trouble starts if they get under your skin, e.g. through a wound, where they can cause serious problems.

I had my blood thoroughly tested, and was advised to take penicillin 3 times a day, for 7 days straight.

After about 10 days (counting from the first day of the therapy) I was feeling completely well again.

If I hadn’t gone to see the doctor, the whole thing would have developed into a sepsis - your common blood poisoning - with all its nasty consequences. In retrospective I’m really glad that my whole illness wasn’t exclusively caused by a Python bite but could have been inflicted by any deep scratch or the bite of any other “harmless” animal.

On the other hand this is somewhat alarming. After all, I learned in a quite drastic and painful way that every minor scratch or bite, no matter how harmless it might look, can have serious consequences.

So take a piece of advice from me: Always see your doctor - in time!