

Foot Ulcers

Patient and Carer Information

Podiatry Service

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What is a foot ulcer?

A foot ulcer is a medical term for an open sore. Foot ulcers can take weeks or months to heal. Occasionally they can deteriorate and lead to severe infection, gangrene or amputation.

Common causes of foot ulcers:

- Ill-fitting footwear
- Injury
- Walking barefoot
- Poor foot hygiene
- Dry skin.

Diabetes, foot deformity, poor blood supply or nerve damage to the feet can increase the risk of foot ulcers.

How are foot ulcers treated?

A treatment plan will be agreed between you and your podiatrist following an assessment. This plan will include regular dressings, debridement and pressure relief, as explained below:

Regular dressing of your ulcer

There are many different kinds of dressings; your podiatrist will suggest the best one for you.

Debridement when appropriate

Debridement is a term used to describe the removal of hard skin, dead or infected tissue. Debridement is not usually painful.

Studies have shown that appropriate debridement of foot ulcers helps them to heal faster.

Debridement reveals the full size of the ulcer:

- It reduces the pressure on the edge of the ulcer
- It reduces the risk of trapped infection.

Following debridement, the ulcer may appear bigger or may bleed, but it will be a cleaner ulcer. The quickest way to debride an ulcer is using a scalpel blade. If this is not appropriate, a suitable dressing may be applied to encourage the ulcer to debride itself.

Pressure relief is an important part of your treatment plan. Any pressure exerted on your ulcer, either from footwear or walking, will slow down the healing process.

There are many different ways of taking pressure off your ulcer. You and your podiatrist can decide together which would be best for you. Resting your foot as much as possible provides the best form of pressure relief.

Do I need to take antibiotics?

You will only need antibiotics if your ulcer is infected. You will receive individual advice if you develop infection.

Remember - you should contact your Podiatrist or GP immediately if you:

- Develop hot or cold sweats or flu-like symptoms
- Notice any change to your affected foot, such as an increase in swelling, redness, pain, or the amount of fluid coming from the ulcer.

Will I need special tests?

Sometimes tests may be necessary. These will include:

- A swab from the ulcer to help identify bacteria (germs) which may be causing infection
- Circulation tests on your legs and feet – sensation tests to determine the feeling in your feet (neuropathy is the term used to describe a loss of feeling).
- Blood tests
- X-ray or scan to help determine if infection is in the bone.

Useful information

Do:

- Try to keep your legs elevated
- Try to keep your blood sugars under control if you have Diabetes. This is important to help promote healing
- Stop smoking. Smoking can damage your circulation and delay the healing process
- Keep your dressing in place and keep it dry
- Use any special footwear or insoles with which you have been provided
- Wear appropriate footwear at all times – even at home. Your podiatrist will be happy to advise you about footwear.

Do not:

- Sit or stand in one position for a long time
- Sit too close to the fire or heater
- Use hot water bottles, electric blankets or any other kind of heated pad
- Step straight into a hot bath – always check the temperature first using a bath thermometer, not your hands.

You can get further advice and information from the following website:

<https://cop.org.uk>

Foot Health

[What is Podiatry?](#)

[Common Foot Problems](#)

[Podiatric Surgery](#)

[Sport Medicine](#)

[Footwear](#)

[Keep on Walking](#)

[Diabetes](#)

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Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

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Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use and store the information we hold about you, please take a look at our “how we use your information” leaflet which can be found on the Trust website: https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient_information/leaflets/

This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille and other languages upon request. For more information please ask in the department/ward.

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