

Podiatry Department

Foot ulcers

How to look after your foot ulcer and help it to heal

Patient information factsheet

What is a foot ulcer?

- An ulcer is a medical term for an open sore.
- Foot ulcers can take weeks or even months to heal.
- A foot ulcer may look small and harmless, but it can become serious, especially if you have diabetes or poor circulation.
- Without good care, an ulcer may not heal and there is a risk that an infection may develop.

What causes foot ulcers?

- Common causes are:
 - Badly fitting footwear
 - Walking barefoot
 - Injury
 - Poor hygiene (not washing your feet)
 - Dry skin
 - A foot deformity combined with poor blood flow or nerve damage.
- Sometimes foot ulcers can get worse and cause serious infections like gangrene (when body tissue dies because it doesn't get enough blood).
- In worst cases you might need surgery to remove part of the foot.

How to help your ulcer heal

- ✓ **You must keep your wound dressing on and completely dry.**
- ✓ If the bandage gets wet, bacteria can get into the ulcer and cause an infection.

- ✓ If you get the dressing wet, remove it and replace it with a clean, sterile dressing (available in chemists).
- ✓ You must also contact the Podiatry Department or your GP Surgery.
- ✓ You can buy or ask your GP to prescribe you a **waterproof limb cover** to help keep the dressing dry and still allow you to bath/shower.
- ✓ **You must** attend your Podiatry appointments. You may need regular appointments until the wound has healed.
- ✓ **You must** rest your foot as much as possible, if you have been instructed to.
- ✓ If you are diabetic, you must keep your blood sugar levels well controlled. **This is VERY important** to help healing and reduce the risk of infection.
- ✓ **Stop smoking.** Smoking can damage your circulation and delay the healing process. Ask your GP, Nurse, Pharmacist or Podiatrist for advice.
- ✓ **You must** use any special footwear or insoles you have been given.
- ✓ You may be prescribed a temporary shoe to wear on the affected foot while your ulcer heals.
- ✓ If this needs replacing, please speak to your GP who will be able to re-prescribe it.
- ✓ **You must** inspect your feet every day for any redness, inflammation or discharge (pus).
- ✓ **You must** eat a healthy and balanced diet. Poor nutrition will prolong the healing of your ulcer.
- × **Do not** sit or stand in one position for a long time.
- × **Do not** sit too close to a fire or heater.
- × **Do not** use hot water bottles, electric blankets or any other kind of heated pad.
- × **Do not** step straight into a hot bath - always check the temperature first.

Please also note:

- Please make sure that you inform your GP or podiatry team of any medications you are taking or treatments you are having.
- Some medications (such as steroids and anti-cancer drugs) can affect the body's ability to heal an ulcer.

How are foot ulcers treated?

There are many ways that ulcers are treated to help the healing process. These include:

Regular dressing of your ulcer

- There are many kinds of ulcer dressings that try to create a good wound healing environment.
- Your podiatrist will suggest the best one for you.

Debridement (by a trained professional)

- Debridement is the medical term used to describe the removal of dead or infected tissue.
- Debridement is not normally painful.
- After debridement, the ulcer may look bigger or may bleed, but it will be a much healthier wound.
- The quickest way to debride ulcers is with a scalpel blade.
- If this is not appropriate, a suitable dressing will be chosen by the Podiatrist, to be applied to the ulcer - this may help encourage the ulcer to debride itself.

Pressure Relief

- Pressure relief is an important part of your treatment plan.
- Any pressure on your foot ulcer, from shoes or walking, can make it heal more slowly.
- There are many ways of taking pressure off your ulcer such as casts, footwear and padding.
- You and your Podiatrist can decide together which would be best for you.

Footwear

- You might be asked to wear different shoes while your foot ulcer is being treated.
- This may help take pressure off your foot or make room for a thick bandage in your shoes
- You may also be given advice for long term footwear changes to help prevent new ulcers from developing. (See 'Further Information' section).

Will I need special tests?

Sometimes tests might be needed. These may include:

- A swab or sample taken from the ulcer to check for bacteria if an infection is suspected.

- Circulation tests on your legs and feet
- Blood tests
- X-ray or scan to show us if there is infection in the bone.

Do I need to take antibiotics?

- Only if your ulcer is infected.
- You will receive special advice if you need to take antibiotics.

How can I spot an infection?

You might notice some changes to your affected foot or leg such as:

- New ulcers, bleeding or blisters?
- Swelling- have your shoes or socks become tight?
- Colour changes- Is there any new redness, blueish marks, or paleness to the skin around the dressing? In darker skin tones, you may notice skin looking darker than usual, sometimes like bruising.
- Pain- is there any new pain or increased pain around the ulcer or affected foot?
- Temperature- Does your foot feel hotter or colder than usual?
- Discharge- is there more leaking fluid, blood or pus from the ulcer than usual?
- Smell- has your foot developed an unpleasant smell that wasn't there previously?
- You may also develop cold or hot sweats or flu-like symptoms. This might mean you have a spreading infection.

Who should I contact if I think my foot is getting worse?

During work hours

- Contact your Podiatry Team for advice on 020 3316 1111 or 020 3316 1600 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm).
- You can contact your GP during their surgery hours.
- If you are unable to seek advice from the above services, please refer to the out-of-hours information provided below.

Out of hours

- NHS 111: Service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and can be accessed online www.111.nhs.uk
- Urgent Treatment Centres: they are open during extended hours and can treat minor injuries and illnesses.

- If you think you have a spreading or worsening infection and feel unwell go straight to your nearest Accident and Emergency Department.
- Urgent diabetic foot service at the Royal Free Hospital (for diabetics only): you can attend the Royal Free Hospital Accident & Emergency Department without a referral.

Further information

Footwear

- Tight shoes that are too narrow or shallow in the toe area often cause blisters and calluses. These can lead to ulcers.
- We recommend that you get your feet measured in length and width regularly.
- Feet can change shape, especially around the front part, where the toes sit.
- If you have been told you need extra wide and extra deep shoes, you may find the below retailers helpful:
 - Cosyfeet: www.cosyfeet.com Tel: 01458 293 123
 - WiderFit Shoes: www.widerfitshoes.co.uk Tel: 01933 311 077
 - DB Easy: www.dbshoes.co.uk Tel: 01933 359 217
 - FitVille: www.fitville.uk

Temporary Footwear

- Your Podiatrist may also recommend a temporary therapeutic shoe, which can be prescribed by your GP.
- This type of shoe, called a **Kerraped Plantar Ulcer Shoe System**, provides lots of room for larger, thicker dressings and keeping pressure off the ulcer.

Size (Includes single shoe + insole)	Model	PIP- Code: (For GP)
Small (shoe size: 2-5.5)	KPUC002	374-3192
Medium (shoe size: 6- 7.5)	KPUC003	374-3200
Large (shoe size: 8-10)	KPUC004	374-3218
Extra Large (shoe size: 10.5- 13)	KPUC005	374-3226

Waterproof Limb Covers

Your GP can prescribe a LimbO Foot cover.

- See below chart for sizing.

Leg Circumference	Model	Size	PIP- Code: (For GP)
20-25 cm	MP20	Small	416- 6476
23-34cm	MP25	Medium- Large	416-64-84

- LimbO covers can also be purchased directly from the manufacturer.
Tel: 01243 578 755. Email: info@limboproducts.co.uk
Website: www.limboproducts.co.uk
- Seal Tight, Fasola, StrideOn also sell similar foot covers for showering and are available from online retailers.

Nutrition and Healing

- Good nutrition is very important to help with wound healing.
- Having a well-balanced diet plays an important role.
- It improves your immune system, protects your body against infection and reduces the time it takes for ulcers to heal.
- You must make sure that you eat foods that are rich in vitamins and minerals.
- You also need extra protein to help your ulcer heal.

See below to find out which foods contain which nutrients:

Nutrient	Reason	Dietary Source
Protein	Helps repair body tissue	Meat, eggs, cheese, yogurt, soya, Quorn, tofu, beans, lentils, nuts
Vitamin A	Helps make new skin tissue	Liver, cheese, eggs, green leafy vegetables, carrot, sweet potato
Vitamin C	Helps absorb iron	Citrus fruits, berries, tomatoes, broccoli, peppers
Vitamin E	Helps wound repair and immune function	Vegetable and seed oils, nuts, eggs, avocado, olives
Iron	Helps maintain blood level.	Red meat, beans, pulses, nuts, quinoa, spinach, kale

Zinc	Helps make new skin tissue	Meat, offal (animal organs like kidneys, hearts, livers), wholegrain bread and cereals, lentils and beans.
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Remember:

- **You** play an important role in helping your foot ulcer heal.
- Following the advice of your Podiatry team and acting quickly is very important.
- Doing this will give you the best chances of healing and stopping the ulcer from getting worse.

Individual advice

Contact our service

Podiatry Department (Central Booking Service)

Call us on 020 3316 1111 or 020 3316 1600 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm).

Contact our Trust

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on **020 7288 5551** or whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet, please email whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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