

DIABETIC FOOT CARE ADVICE: CARING FOR YOUR ULCER

Your foot has an ulcer. An ulcer is an area of skin that has broken down exposing underlying tissue. Ulcers are often slow to heal and require a concerted effort on behalf of both clinicians and patients to ensure they resolve as quickly as possible.

On occasion the wound may be deep, and possibly even extend to bone. If this is the case your podiatrist will arrange for an urgent referral so you can be examined by hospital specialists who may be concerned about the possibility of infection, particularly in the bone. Usually, though, the wound is only superficial and healing can be encouraged through regular podiatric care. Your podiatrist will advise you of the severity of your wound.

Diabetes can delay the rate of healing in a lesion, and impair the efficiency of the immune response. This means that a wound, even a small superficial one, can lead to ulceration and/or infection. Any infection needs to be treated **as soon as possible**, and you may need prescribed antibiotic therapy.

If an infection is left unchecked it may spread further into healthy tissue, make you systemically unwell, or even extend into bone – as a result amputation of the affected site may be the only remaining option.

It is important to have regular check-ups with your GP, or diabetic nurse. This is so your blood glucose levels, blood pressure and cholesterol levels are closely monitored – these are all factors that, if left unchecked, can worsen both your foot health and general wellbeing.

PODIATRY TREATMENT AND YOUR ULCER

Wounds may not always be obvious – you may not feel much pain because the sensation in your feet isn't good, or there may not be much redness, heat or swelling due to an impaired blood supply. The wound may not be visible as they can sometimes be hidden under callus or hard skin – only when the callus is removed can the wound be fully exposed.

The podiatrist will also want to remove any dead tissue or discharge from the wound and this often results in bleeding – this is completely normal. You may feel that you've been left with a worse wound than when you arrived – this is a common reaction.

However, the exposure of the wound and the removal of dead tissue are absolutely necessary to encourage healing and lessen the chances of infection.

HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR ULCER

Your podiatrist will apply an appropriate dressing to your wound. It is important that you keep the dressing dry and in place for the prescribed amount of time – your podiatrist will advise you on how long this should be. It is not uncommon for your podiatrist to issue some spare dressings and provide instructions on how to apply them properly in between appointments – this is because it is important not to keep the same dressing on for too long.

ANTIBIOTICS AND INFECTION

It is possible that you may be prescribed antibiotics if there are signs of infection. Do not stop taking the medication until you have finished your course, or are instructed to do so. If you do experience any adverse side effects with the medication report it to the prescriber who may issue you with an alternative. If the infection spreads, you may need hospital admission.

FOOTWEAR

After dressing the wound the podiatrist will look at ways of protecting the area, and this is often done through the deflection of pressure by padding. It is important that your footwear is suitable to accommodate any dressings or padding the podiatrist issues, and that the fit and design of your shoes does not aggravate the wound, decreasing the rate of healing. In cases where the ulcer is not healing, it may be necessary for your foot to be cast so a special shoe or boot can be manufactured - your podiatrist will advise you if this is necessary.

PODIATRY APPOINTMENTS

It is of great importance that podiatry appointments are attended to help encourage wound healing – this may be on a weekly basis to begin with. You may also be seeing a district or tissue viability nurse for regular re-dressings if you have poor mobility or eyesight difficulties.

DANGER AND THE DIABETIC FOOT

It is very important to continue to check your feet daily when you have ulceration. This is because new wounds may develop as a result of changing the way you walk in an attempt to protect your existing wound.

Be aware of the following danger signs that may indicate infection and the need for urgent medical attention:

- Any new pain or throbbing?
- Does your foot feel hotter than normal?
- Can you see any new inflammation, redness or swelling?
- Is there a strong smell from your foot that you haven't previously noticed?
- Is there any discharge?
- Do you feel you have any flu-like symptoms?

KEEP YOUR DRESSING DRY

If the dressing gets wet, healing may be delayed and you will be at a higher risk of infection. It may be possible to provide you with an outer dressing that helps cover the wound area that allows you to bath or shower safely.

AVOID STANDING OR WALKING ON THE AFFECTED FOOT

Avoid unnecessary walking or standing, as much as is practicable. If a wound is constantly under pressure, or exposed to friction, it will not heal. Resting the area is critical to avoid disturbing delicate healing tissue. If your podiatrist provides you with an insole or some padding to help protect the area it is in your best interests to use them.

INDIVIDUAL ADVICE

If there is any further advice not mentioned that is relevant to your individual condition the podiatrist will write this below:

Remember - If you have any problems with your feet, or suspect that you do, then do not hesitate to contact your podiatrist.

USEFUL WEBSITES:

Diabetes UK, the UK's leading diabetes charity provides a wealth of information:
<http://www.diabetes.org.uk/>

Comprehensive advice and information from the NHS:
<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diabetes/pages/diabetes.aspx>

Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation – a UK charity with international links:
<http://www.drwf.org.uk/>

National Institute for Health Research – Focus on diabetes:
http://www.crncc.nihr.ac.uk/focus_on/diabetes/focus_on_diabetes

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the problem with your foot. This leaflet is not a substitute for professional medical advice and should be used in conjunction with verbal information and treatment given.

Patient Booking Line: 0203 633 3554 (local)

Can we improve our service to you?
Please visit www.healthshare.org.uk and
click **Patient Survey**
or email us at enquiry@healthshare.org.uk