

# Foot ulceration

## Information & advice for self-care

**Warning:** Please treat any foot ulcers (wounds) as an emergency and seek help from your GP without delay, or podiatrist if you are an existing patient.

### What is a foot ulcer?

A foot ulcer is a lesion, wound or break in the skin and soft tissue on your foot that may possibly take longer to heal.

### What causes ulcers?

- Poor circulation (peripheral vascular disease)
- Loss of sensation (peripheral neuropathy)
- Foot deformities due to arthritis and other conditions, leading to high pressure areas on foot/feet
- Gait abnormalities
- Poorly fitting footwear

These factors may impact/reduce the skin's ability to react to fluctuations in pressure on the foot during gait, increasing the risk of trauma or damage to skin and risk of ulceration.



### What can help a foot ulcer heal?

Removing the source of the problem, for example pressure reduction, may help fragile skin to heal. This can be achieved by resting the foot as much as possible, using pressure relieving padding, insoles or orthopaedic footwear.

For some patients, a total contact cast or other pressure relieving device may be better suited. Your podiatrist will discuss and advise you on treatment options.

### How are foot ulcers treated?

There are a number of things a podiatrist may do in the treatment of a foot ulcer, provided they are appropriate for the presenting wound. These may include:

- The removal of callus and non-viable tissue which surrounds the wound using a scalpel blade, termed sharp debridement. It is important that any non-viable tissue is removed, as this can be detrimental to the wound healing and if not removed it may lead to the deterioration of the wound. Please be aware that a wound can look bigger after treatment and bleeding often occurs. Sharp debridement should not be attempted by any patient
- Pressure relief, such as padding, insoles or specialist footwear
- Wound swabbing or tissue samples to test for infection
- Antibiotic treatment in the presence of infection. Antibiotics may be changed pending swab or tissue sample laboratory results
- X-rays, bone scans or other imaging investigations
- Vascular assessment and intervention to improve blood circulation if necessary

### To assist in the management of your foot ulcer, you may be asked to:

- Follow your podiatrist's advice on wound care and dressings
- Wear protective footwear and refrain from walking barefoot, indoors or outdoors
- Wear (bespoke) footwear if this has been made for you
- Rest the foot as much as possible
- Stop or reduce smoking
- Keep wound dressings dry and clean

### Specialist podiatry wound care clinics

Podiatrists are located at various clinics in the community where the diagnosis, management and treatment of ulcerations can be achieved. On your first appointment (assessment), the podiatrist will be able to determine the cause of your foot ulcer and develop the most appropriate care plan for you.

The sensation and circulation on your feet will be assessed. A photographic image of the ulcer may be taken at every appointment so its size can be compared/assessed/monitored. You will be advised on your current/most appropriate footwear needs.

All podiatrists working for East Coast Community Healthcare are wound care specialists, so you may not see the same person at each visit. This is beneficial for your care, as it gives you more options with regards to appointments and locations where you can be seen. There are regular case conferences within the team and other healthcare professionals to manage your case which will be discussed fully with you.

### Multidisciplinary Diabetic Foot Team (MDfT)

For non-healing wounds, such as osteomyelitis (bone infection) or Charcot foot (see Charcot foot leaflet), you may be referred to the MDfT.

This highly specialist foot team includes a vascular surgeon, foot and ankle surgeon, consultant endocrinologist, musculoskeletal specialist, podiatrists and a podiatry assistant.

We are hoping to include a microbiologist and a orthotist to the team in the future. The clinic is based at the James Paget University Hospital.

### SOS advice

If you notice a problem with your feet, please don't ignore it; seek advice straight away. The signs that should cause concern and may be an indication of infection are:

- Any new ulcers or blistered areas on your feet
- Your foot becoming noticeably hotter than normal
- Any colour change: red/blue/bruising
- Any new areas of swelling on your feet
- Any discharge coming through the dressing where previously it was dry
- Any new pain or throbbing sensation
- Your foot developing an unpleasant odour
- Feeling feverish or unwell may also indicate the presence of infection

### Compliments, concerns or complaints

PALS may be the best starting point if you have a question or concern. If you would like to find an NHS dentist, know where your nearest doctor is or talk through a problem you have had with a service, you can contact the PALS service.

**Tel:** 01502 445447

**Email:** [ECCH.patientliaison@nhs.net](mailto:ECCH.patientliaison@nhs.net)

#### Or write to:

PALS, East Coast Community Healthcare,  
Hamilton House, Battery Green Road,  
Lowestoft, NR32 1DE

This content was produced by the College of Podiatry. Find out more:

<https://cop.org.uk/common-foot-problems>



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