

## Looking after a diabetic foot ulcer

Diabetes information and advice leaflet



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Your assessment has shown the presence of a diabetic foot ulcer. Some people with diabetes find their skin does not heal as well as it did and they are more likely to develop an ulcer or infection after a minor injury. An ulcer is an area of skin that has broken down and the tissue under it is now exposed. One in ten people with diabetes will develop a foot ulcer at some stage.

A foot ulcer can become infected and the infection may become severe. It is important to look after a foot ulcer to prevent infection occurring.

Good blood glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure levels, and regular foot assessment by a podiatrist will help to reduce future foot problems.

Smoking affects the circulation. This increases the chance of amputation. Seek advice to help quit.

Regular podiatry treatment is essential for your diabetic foot ulcer; the podiatrist will develop a treatment plan to meet your specific needs.

## **Podiatry treatment for your diabetic foot ulcer**

Diabetic foot ulcers are sometimes hidden beneath hard skin and can gather dead tissue around them.

The podiatrist will need to remove this to help healing. This can cause the ulcer to bleed and sometimes make it larger in size but this is completely normal.

## **How to look after diabetic foot ulcers**

The podiatrist will instruct you of the dressing regime and care, however please continue to check feet daily for any other problem areas.

## **Danger signs**

Pay close attention to any of the following on the feet:

- Is there any pain or throbbing?
- Does it feel hotter than usual?
- Are there any new areas of redness, inflammation or swelling?
- Is there any fluid leakage or increased amount of fluid leakage?
- Is there a smell?
- Do you have any flu-like symptoms?
- You may have red streaking and/or pain further up the leg which could indicate spreading infection that if not treated could result in sepsis or even death.

If an infection is severe, an amputation may be needed.

### **Do not get the dressing wet**

Getting the dressing wet prevents healing and allows bacteria to enter the ulcer, resulting in an infection. Ensure you moisturise all other areas of your feet you can access to prevent new wounds developing.

The podiatrist may give you a form to take to your GP to get a dressing protector on prescription. This protector will allow washing while keeping the dressing dry.

Do not stand or walk on the affected foot. Avoid any unnecessary standing or walking and rest as much as possible, keeping the foot up to help it to heal.

### **Rest is essential**

Sometimes a cast, a device to relieve pressure or a special shoe is required until the ulcer has healed. You may be given insoles or padding to help reduce pressure/friction to the ulcer site. It is important you wear these items every time you walk.

### **Podiatry appointments**

Always attend appointments to have the ulcer treated until the wound has healed and continue to follow advice or it will return.

### **Antibiotic treatment**

If there are signs of infection, antibiotics may be provided. If the infection is spreading, antibiotics will be given by the hospital straight into your blood stream to treat the infection quickly.

### **Operations**

When the circulation is reduced, an operation to increase blood supply to the ulcerated area may be needed. Sometimes, if an infection becomes severe, an operation is required to clean out the wound. If an infection is very severe, an amputation may be needed to save healthy parts of the foot/leg.

Podiatry Foot Protection Services  
Cantley Health Centre  
Middleham Road, Cantley  
Doncaster DN4 6ED  
Tel 03000 211 550

Further information is available online:

[www.rdash.nhs.uk/services/podiatry-foot-protection/](http://www.rdash.nhs.uk/services/podiatry-foot-protection/)  
[www.rcpod.org.uk](http://www.rcpod.org.uk)  
[www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)

