

Patient information

Looking after your foot ulcer

What is a foot ulcer?

A foot ulcer is a wound or sore on your foot that occurs when an area of thickened skin is left untreated. It can also start by a shoe rubbing or a minor injury such as stepping on something sharp.

Conditions such as Diabetes can damage your blood supply or sensation to your feet and you are at risk of developing problems because you may not notice when they get injured.

Around 1 in 10 people with diabetes will develop a foot ulcer which is why it is important to get regular foot checks.

What happens next?

Looking after an ulcer is vital to reduce the risk of infection. If infection is not treated quickly you may need surgery to remove part of the foot. If you are not seeing a specialist podiatrist already, you will be referred immediately. You may need to be seen in a specialist multidisciplinary clinic with a team of different health professionals, who all can work together to help your ulcer heal as quickly as possible.

Your treatment plan

A treatment plan will be agreed with you. This will involve:

- Removing the dead skin and cleaning the wound. This is usually not painful
- Specialist dressings applied to facilitate healing
- Regular checks and redressing appointments
- Possible multidisciplinary clinical appointments with different health professionals to help heal your ulcer as quickly as possible.

A special dressing will be applied to keep the dressing clean and encourage healing; this will need to be changed regularly, either by a podiatrist or a district nurse. There are some important things you can do to help your foot ulcer to heal:

- Keep your dressing dry and clean
- You can get dressing protectors so you can shower without getting the dressing wet. These are available to order from Chemists, Proctors or other mobility aid retailers and are available from numerous sources online.

You should rest and elevate your foot, avoid standing or walking on your affected foot as much as possible. You may be given a temporary shoe, boot or other offloading device to help reduce the pressure on your ulcer. These may be removable or non-removable.

If you smoke, you **must** stop as smoking will reduce the blood flow to your foot and slows down healing, if you need help quitting talk to your podiatrist or nurse.

Control your blood sugars as carefully as you can, a normal blood glucose level will help your ulcer to heal. High sugars levels increase the likelihood of infection which will delay healing. Talk to your diabetic team if you are having problems managing your blood sugars.

Danger signs (signs of infection)

- **Heat** - does your foot feel hotter than usual or compared to other foot
- **Swelling** - has your shoe become tighter recently
- **Colour changes** - is your skin red around the ulcer or have a blueish tinge or mottled appearance.
- **Painful or throbbing** - increase in pain
- **Smell** - is there a new or unpleasant smell from your foot
- **Discharge** - increase in discharge or pus coming from ulcer
- **New ulcers or wounds development**

SEPSIS

Sometimes a severe infection can spread into your blood stream and be life threatening and is called sepsis. The symptoms of sepsis can sometimes be mistaken as flu, a tummy bug or a chest infection. Signs of sepsis include:

- Slurred speech
- Extreme shivering or muscle pains
- No urination in 24hrs
- Breathlessness
- A feeling that you may die
- Your skin becoming mottled or discolored

If you have any of the above symptoms of sepsis, call 111 or go to the Emergency Department (A&E) immediately

Podiatry central booking office number – Tel: 0300 131 4536

Hot foot line – Tel: (01323) 438209

Sources of information

Health and Care Professions Council - www.hcpc-uk.org

College of Podiatry - www.cop.uk

NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk

Diabetes UK - www.diabetes.org.uk

NICE - www.nice.org.uk

Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team - Tel: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 135860 or by email: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4500 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

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The Clinical Specialty/Unit that have agreed this patient information leaflet:
Podiatry ESHT NHS

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