



The Shrewsbury and  
Telford Hospital  
NHS Trust

## Patient Information

### Diabetes foot ulcers

#### What is a foot ulcer and what can I do to help?

#### Diabetes Foot Clinic

Diabetes Foot Clinic Telephone: 01743 261000 Extension: 3055  
(Monday to Friday 08.30 am to 16.30pm)

Diabetes Foot Clinic Email: [sath.dfc@nhs.net](mailto:sath.dfc@nhs.net)

Community Podiatry Telephone: 01743 277681  
(Monday to Friday 08.30am to 17.00pm)

Emergency mobile: 07843 50 50 15  
(Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 08.30am to 16.30pm)

In case of an emergency outside of these hours contact 111 for medical advice)

## Diabetes Foot Ulcer

Diabetes foot ulcers are areas of broken skin which can be very slow to heal or fail to heal. They can get bigger, develop serious infections and can lead to amputation. They are usually caused by:

- ◇ Injury
- ◇ Neuropathy (numbness)
- ◇ Peripheral Arterial Disease (poor blood flow to your feet)
- ◇ High blood sugar levels
- ◇ Kidney Disease
- ◇ Pressure from poorly fitting footwear
- ◇ Significant foot problem (such as a misshapen toe).
- ◇ Too much hard skin
- ◇ Infection
- ◇ Bed pressure

## Diabetic Foot Clinic - The Multi-Disciplinary Team

Diabetes foot ulcers can be difficult to heal, so you will need help from a variety of members of the diabetic foot clinic team, all working together with you to help you heal faster and keeping you ulcer free for the future:

- ◇ Specialist Podiatrists
- ◇ Orthotists (specialists in pressure relief devices)
- ◇ Diabetes Consultants
- ◇ Specialist Diabetes Nurses
- ◇ Dieticians
- ◇ Vascular (blood flow) Consultants
- ◇ Tissue Viability Nurses

We work closely with your GP, community or practice nurses, and community podiatry teams to help develop a plan **with you** to help you heal **faster** and with **fewer complications**.

## Ulcer treatment

### Dressings

It is important to keep a dressing on your ulcer to help keep germs out and soak up any fluid that leaks.

**Avoid leaving wounds uncovered, for even very short periods of time.** Diabetes foot ulcers tend to be sticky. Sock fluff, dirt & germs can get stuck in the wound and prevent healing if left uncovered. Diabetes foot ulcers can develop infections **very quickly** because diabetes can damage your immune response (your body's way of fighting infection). Keeping a clean dressing on the ulcer can help reduce your risk of developing an infection.

Keep your dressings dry in the bath or shower. Wet soggy dressings tend to become **infected**. If you need help keeping your dressings dry, please let the team know—specialist Limbo' dressing covers are available, however these can be slippery in the bath/ shower, so might not be suitable for everyone. Sometimes, just having a flannel wash (washing your body from head to toe with a flannel) might be better.

If you notice discharge coming through your dressing, or if the outside of your dressing has become wet, this means that infections can sneak into your wound. Please arrange for a new clean dressing to be applied ASAP.

Specialist dressings act on specific stages of wound healing or infection and will likely change depending on what the ulcer needs at that time. **However, dressings alone will not usually be enough to help wounds heal. To heal an ulcer, we need to treat the cause.**

### **Pressure relief**

#### **Rest & keep off your feet as much as possible**

When you stand or walk, the pressure from your weight (or from poor style footwear) can squash and kill delicate new skin cells within the ulcer, preventing healing. It can squash and injure blood vessels supplying the wound with essential blood and nutrients required for healing. **Every step** could cause further damage.

Remember most diabetes foot ulcers will have some level of sensation loss. Due to this numbness you might damage your ulcer without realizing it.

- ◇ Does any of your in-house or outdoor footwear squash your feet?
- ◇ Check your sleeping and sitting positions in case they put pressure on your ulcer.
- ◇ Your activity levels— Unless you have very poor blood flow you will usually be advised to rest as much as possible. Think of ways you can really reduce **any** weight-bearing or walking. Who else can help you? e.g. family or friends. Do you need time off work/ hobbies/ normal responsibilities? Taking time off can be difficult but this will help your ulcer heal quicker and can prevent long-term complications.

#### **Specialist Footwear:**

Our Orthotists can help provide specialist footwear & devices to help reduce pressure to the ulcer.

The best treatment is our 'Aircast Boot' or 'Total Contact Cast' (similar to those used when a leg bone is broken). Research has shown that these, when used correctly (for **any** weight-bearing **inside and outside the house**), can speed up healing & recovery.

Remember: Pressure relief devices can only work when they are being used. These are medical devices and are as important as taking medicines.

#### **Blood flow surgery:**

If you have very poor blood flow to your feet, this can prevent wound healing. You might be offered surgery to improve blood flow if needed.

**Blood sugars:**

High blood sugar levels directly slow down healing and increase infections (if there is more sugar in your blood, then there is more 'food' for any germs to use to grow and spread faster).

Our Diabetes Specialist Nurses and consultants are here to help you achieve the best diabetes control suitable for you. We know everybody is different & has different needs. Having the right blood sugar control will help keep you healthier, feel better and stop sugars causing damage to your body (such as eyes, kidneys and nerves)

**Debridement**

Most foot ulcers seal early with hard skin or dead tissue, hiding the ulcer underneath making it look 'healed' before it is really healed. Hard skin is made worse by pressure.

This hard skin or dead tissue can cause lots of problems with wound healing and increase risk of infection. So our Podiatrists gently remove (debride) this hard skin to help the ulcer heal much faster. This is not normally painful.

Sometimes removing the hard skin can make the ulcer look bigger, by showing what was already hiding under the hard skin.

Occasionally debridement can cause a tiny bleed, if this does happen we will put a dressing on. The benefits of debridement to the wound outweigh the small risk of slight bleeding.

**Surgical Debridement:**

Very occasionally surgery might be needed to remove deeper dead or infected tissue.

**Antibiotics & Infection:**

If you have an infection you might need to take antibiotics. This may mean taking different types of antibiotics for many weeks, particularly if the infection has spread to the bones under the ulcer. Sometimes surgery can be used to apply antibiotic beads or paste to infected bones.

With more serious infections antibiotics may need to be given directly into your blood through an intravenous (IV) drip.

Sometimes antibiotics can make you feel unwell. If you are experiencing side effects please talk to our team. It is important that you complete your antibiotic course to make sure that they work.

**Look out for Infection danger signs:**

- Flu like symptoms
- Not passing wee in a day
- Redness or heat spreading in your foot
- Increased ulcer pain or discharge
- Any changes in your foot ulcer
- Skin colour changes or darkening
- Unexplained raise in blood sugar level
- Increased pain – however if you have numbness in your feet, you might not notice any or little pain

(If any of the above apply this may mean that your current antibiotics treatment is not working and your infection might be spreading, or that you might have a new infection. If any of these occur please seek urgent medical advice).

## **Remember diabetes foot infections spread very quickly, early treatment is key to success**

### **Smoking:**

Smoking directly delays wound healing and increases the risk of infection. If you do smoke please stop smoking or consider reducing your amount. Even if you have been smoking for years, your ulcer will benefit from stopping smoking. It is never too late to stop. The benefits of stopping smoking start very quickly. Support services are available to help e.g. NHS Better Health: Quit Smoking

### **Eating and drinking:**

Often losing excess weight can help with your diabetes control and wound healing. Eating a healthy, well balanced diet is important. Choose healthy carbohydrates such as brown rice or pulses, eat less processed and red meat, more fruit and vegetables and if snacking choose healthy options. Drink plenty of fluids (at least 6 to 8 glasses of water a day).

If you would like more information on eating a healthy diet – please ask as support services are available.

### **Investigations:**

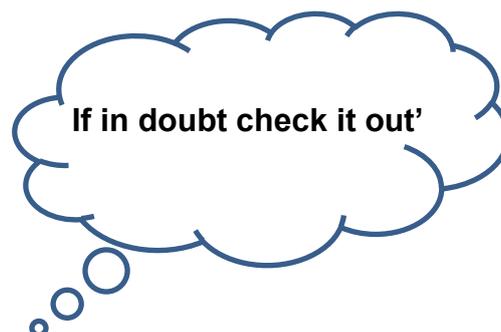
It is normal to be sent for X-rays, blood tests, or a special scan to look at your blood supply to get a more detailed picture of your health and the ulcer itself.

If you have any questions or concerns please ask. Our team are very friendly and happy to answer any questions at all. There is no such thing as a silly question.

**If you do notice any of the following, cover area with a clean dry dressing and contact the Diabetes Foot Clinic as soon as possible: We are here to help.**

- ◇ **Red, hot or swollen foot**
- ◇ **Foot wounds or blisters**
- ◇ **Splits in the skin**
- ◇ **Signs of infection**
- ◇ **Skin colour changes or dark areas**

**If you think that you might have an infection or deteriorating infection please also contact your GP or out of hours service (NHS 111 or the Emergency Department for urgent antibiotics advice.**



## Further information is available from;

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

We act on your behalf when handling patient and family concerns, liaising with staff, managers and where appropriate, relevant organisations to negotiate immediate or prompt solutions. We can also help you get support from other local or national agencies.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Tel: 0800 783 0057 or 01743 261691

Princess Royal Hospital, Tel: 01952 282888

## Other Sources of Information

### NHS 111

A fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

Telephone: 111 (free from a landline or mobile)

Website: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Patient UK

Provides leaflets on health and disease translated into 11 other languages as well as links to national support/self-help groups and a directory of UK health websites.

Website: [www.patient.info](http://www.patient.info)

### Self Help & Support Groups

A selection of websites providing access to good quality patient and consumer health information, covering specific age groups and conditions.

Also includes Shropshire Community Directory which contains up-to-date information on community groups, clubs, societies, organisations, support groups and self-help groups covering Shropshire and its borders.

Website: [www.library.sath.nhs.uk/find/patients/](http://www.library.sath.nhs.uk/find/patients/)

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