

Foot Ulceration

Information for people with Diabetes

What is a foot ulcer?

A skin ulcer is where an area of skin has broken down and you can see the underlying tissue. Most skin ulcers occur on the lower legs or feet and develop from a small cut or injury.

Any cuts even very small ones should be cleansed with water and covered with a sterile, non-adhesive dressing (to reduce the risk of infection) e.g. Mepore, CosmoporE.

The skin normally heals quickly if it is cut. However, with diabetes, the skin on the feet may not always heal so well and may be prone to developing an ulcer. This can be even after a mild injury such as stepping on a small stone in bare feet or a shoe rubbing.

A foot ulcer is prone to infection, which can develop very quickly and may become severe. Early detection and rapid treatment improves the chances of a good outcome.

Tell the Podiatrist / Nurse / Doctor if you see:

- the ulcer gets bigger or changes colour;
- the skin around the ulcer becomes red;
- you develop bluish marks like bruises;
- the skin is going black;
- the ulcer begins to discharge where it was dry before;
- blood or pus discharging from the ulcer.

Tell the Podiatrist / Nurse / Doctor if:

- the ulcer becomes painful / uncomfortable or is throbbing;
- the ulcer smells strange/ different;
- the foot smells strange/ different;
- the foot swells , you may notice the shoes become tight;
- You feel unwell – if you develop a fever, 'flu-like symptoms' or your diabetes control becomes poor.

Are foot ulcers serious?

Foot ulcers can be serious. They often respond well to treatment but can get worse and take a long time to heal particularly if your circulation is poor.

Because of the complications of diabetes, infection can occur. Sometimes more serious problems can develop such as gangrene and in extreme cases the foot may need to be amputated.

This is why we try to teach people how to take care of their feet and prevent foot ulcers. If you have an ulcer and you develop a **new** cut, blister or ulcer remember it may be serious – report it!

If you have a foot ulcer and you suddenly feel generally unwell i.e. have nausea, fatigue, vomiting, fever or chills or have raised blood glucose levels you should go to see your GP, the Walk in Centre or A&E as soon as possible. It may be that your ulcer has become infected and is causing a general infection.

In case of emergency, or out of Podiatry working hours, please seek urgent medical attention:

- Coventry NHS Healthcare and Walk-in Centre
Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry, CV1 4FH
Telephone: 0300 200 0060
- Accident and Emergency Department
University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire (UHCW), Clifford Bridge Road, Coventry, CV2 2DX

How are foot ulcers treated?

- Treatment is intended to help the skin to heal and to prevent and treat any infection. The ulcer is usually covered with a protective dressing.
- A Podiatrist or nurse will normally examine, clean and re-dress the ulcer regularly.
- A Podiatrist may need to remove any hard skin that prevents the ulcer from healing.
- Padding may be applied to protect the ulcer site from further injury and to take the pressure off the area.
- You may be advised to wear special shoes or have a cast made of your foot to keep the pressure off the ulcer.

Antibiotics will be recommended if the ulcer, or nearby tissue, becomes infected – they are not always necessary.

What can I do to help heal my foot ulcers?

- If you are a smoker try to stop. Ask your Podiatrist or nurse for contact details regarding the local Stop Smoking service.
- Follow the instructions given to you by the Podiatrist with regard to your dressings.
- Attend the appointments offered to you.
- Keep good control of blood sugar levels by eating a healthy diet and taking tablets or injections correctly.
- Rest your leg and foot as much as possible to keep pressure off the wound.

Podiatry Services

City of Coventry Health Centre
2 Stoney Stanton Road
Coventry
CV1 4FS
Telephone: 024 7696 1335

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