

A Diabetic foot ulcer is one of the major foot problems caused by Diabetes. This leaflet will give you important advice on helping to heal your ulcer.

Introduction

When you have a diabetic foot ulcer special attention is needed to help it to heal. This leaflet is to help you understand what NHS Staff can do and what you can do to help yourself.

What is an ulcer?

An ulcer is simply the loss of an area of skin. It can vary in size and may involve deeper tissues. Unfortunately a diabetic foot ulcer can take a long time to heal. Your foot ulcer may be painless, small and trivial, but untreated will often get bigger, perhaps infected. Early treatment is vital to try to prevent this.

What causes an ulcer?

Various things can cause an ulcer:-

- Injury causing a break in your skin, blistering or even severe bruising.
- Wearing a shoe that is too tight or badly fitting.
- Attempts at self treatment of in-growing toenails or corns.
- Abnormal pressures especially on the soles of your foot.
- Bed sores.
- Insect bites animal scratches or splinters.

Why can diabetic foot ulcers take so long to heal?

With most people these will heal, but for those with diabetic nerve damage or bad circulation, the body's healing process is impaired. Smoking, infection, oedema, high cholesterol levels, poor blood sugar control and poor diet all contribute to reduced healing ability.

How is an ulcer healed?

Unfortunately there is usually no quick route to healing an ulcer! A range of factors all need to be considered. Because of this **you** may be referred to specialist diabetic foot clinic at your local hospital. Here the podiatrist and other members of the diabetic foot team will provide the necessary knowledge and dressings to help heal your ulcer.

What happens in the foot clinic?

- Assessment of the problem.
- Pressure relief on the ulcer.
- Dietary advice helping improve general health and the control of your blood glucose.
- The most appropriate dressings.
- Advice on giving up smoking.
- Infection control.

Warning Signs

- Unexplained pain in your toes/foot/leg.
- Changes in the colour of you toes/foot/leg.
- Unexplained staining of your hosiery or inside of your shoes.
- If you know that your feet are numb always examine your feet visually or get someone to do this for you.

Ten Steps to Foot Health

1. Examine your feet daily for blisters, corns, callous, athlete's foot, nail problems or breaks in the skin. Use a mirror to check under your feet.
2. Wash your feet daily and dry well, especially between the toes. Do not soak your feet as this removes all the natural oils.
3. If your skin is dry, use a cream regularly. Ask your Podiatrist, GP or Pharmacist to recommend one for you.
4. Trim your nails regularly, following the natural curve of the toes.
5. Be very careful about walking barefoot, even indoors.

6. Avoid extremes of heat and cold.
7. Have shoes properly fitted at a good shoe shop. If you cannot find suitable shoes, you may be able to have them supplied from the hospital clinic – ask your GP or Podiatrist.
8. Check your shoes daily for stones, worn seams, loose insoles or holes which could injure your feet.
9. Be especially careful of your feet and choice of footwear on holiday, if playing sport or taking exercise. It is often new or different activities which cause damage.
10. Look after yourself – good blood sugar control, exercise, balanced diet and no smoking.

Annual Foot Screening

You should have your feet checked annually by a Podiatrist, GP, Practice Nurse or at the hospital diabetic clinic. The examination includes: -

- Assessing blood flow to your feet by checking your pulses at the ankles. In cases of doubt, extra tests will be carried out or requested.
- Checking for damage to the nerves to your feet and any loss of sensation. This is usually done by asking if you can feel the vibration of a tuning fork on your big toes, and a nylon filament pushed against the soles of your feet. You should report any odd sensations in your feet, such as numbness or pins and needles.
- Checking the structure of your feet for any abnormal pressure loadings.
- Seeing if your shoes are suitable.

The annual foot check is also an opportunity for you to ask about your feet and their care.

Please bring with you: -

1. Your blood sugar monitoring diary or diabetes record book.
2. Hospital issued shoes or the shoes you usually wear.
3. An up to date list of your medication.

Record here the date of your last annual check:-

Warning Signs

Warning signs of something being wrong with your feet include:-

- **Discharge of pus** from a corn, callous, a nail, a cut or injury.
- **Blister**, especially if it contains blood.
- **Cracks in the skin**, often found between the toes or on the heels.
- **Sudden swelling or pain** in your feet or legs, especially if there is no apparent reason.
- **Dark brown or black** discolouration in an area of callous.

If you have any of the above, seek help urgently from your Podiatrist, GP surgery or the hospital diabetic clinic.

Less urgent problems but still in need of attention include: -

- Toenails which are difficult to cut because they are growing too thick or in growing.
- Areas of callous or corns.
- Frequent discomfort or pain in your feet.
- Difficulty in finding shoes which are comfortable.

Contact Numbers

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Mae’r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.**