

Foot Wound Care Q & A

Foot Wound Causes

Most common reasons for foot wounds include diabetes. Diabetes leads to neuropathy. Neuropathy can lead to numbness and deformity that causes wounds. Diabetes can lead to foot amputations.

There are many other causes of foot wounds including:

- Arterial disease
- Inflammatory disease
- Auto-immune disease

Symptoms

Many people who get foot ulcers cannot feel pain, so pain usually is not a symptom. Many times, the first thing you may notice is some drainage or fluid on your socks. Foot ulcers can also cause redness and swelling. If the ulcer gets worse, there might be a bad smell or odor.

When to see a Podiatrist

If you have a foot ulcer, go to a podiatrist (foot doctor) right away. People with diabetes need treatment for foot ulcers to lower the chances of infection and amputation. Getting care can also help you move better, feel better, and save money on health care.

Diagnosis and Treatment

The main goal when treating foot ulcers is to help them heal quickly. The faster the healing, the less chance for infection.

There are several important steps to treat diabetic foot ulcers. They include:

- Stopping infection from happening.
- Taking pressure off the sore area, called “off-loading”.

- Removing dead skin and tissue, called “debridement”.
- Applying medicine or dressings to the ulcer.
- Managing blood glucose and other health problems.

Not all ulcers are infected. If your foot doctor finds that you do have an infection, you will need medicine, wound care, and maybe a hospital stay.

To keep an ulcer from becoming infected, it is important to:

- Keep blood glucose levels under control.
- Keep the ulcer clean and bandaged.
- Clean the wound daily. Use a wound dressing or bandage.
- Avoid walking barefoot.

For the best healing, ulcers, especially those on the bottom of the foot, must be “off-loaded.” You may be asked to wear special footwear, or a brace, specialized castings, or use a wheelchair or crutches. These devices will reduce pressure and irritation to the area with the ulcer. It will also help speed up the healing process.

The science of wound care has become better over the past ten years. The old thought of “let the air get at it” can now be harmful to healing. Wounds and ulcers heal faster, with a lower risk of infection, if they are covered and kept moist. Do not use full-strength Betadine, hydrogen peroxide, whirlpools, and soaking. Using these practices could lead to more problems.

Taking care of a wound means using the right bandages and medicines on the skin. The list below can help foot ulcers heal better:

- Saline (saltwater)
- Special creams
- Ulcer dressings or bandages
- Skin substitutes that have been shown to be highly effective in healing foot ulcers.

For a wound to get better, there needs to be good blood flow to the area. Your foot doctor can check your blood flow with simple, painless tests.

Controlling blood glucose is very important during the treatment of a diabetic foot ulcer. Work with a medical doctor or endocrinologist to control blood glucose. This will improve healing and reduce the risk of problems.

Surgical Options

Most non-infected foot ulcers are treated without surgery. If this treatment method does not work, surgical management may be needed. Examples of surgical care to remove pressure on the affected area include:

- Shaving or excision of bone(s)
- Correction of various deformities (hammertoes, bunions, or bony “bumps”)

Healing time depends on many factors, such as:

- Wound size and location
- Pressure on the wound from walking or standing
- Swelling
- Circulation
- Blood glucose levels
- Wound care
- The medicine applied to the wound

Healing may occur within weeks to several months.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8518