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FAQs about Foot Ulcers

Regina Gallegos MPT, CWS



2211 Lomas Blvd NE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
CHILE Care Clinic 505 925-6526

1. Why isn't my ulcer healing?

Are you putting weight on the foot with the ulcer?

We highly recommend that you **offload** weight from your foot. Offloading means not putting any weight on your foot.

- Weight bearing activities like walking, standing and resting your feet on the ground when you're sitting causes damage to your ulcer and prevents healing.
- **If at all possible**, use crutches, a walker, a knee scooter or a wheelchair to keep pressure off your foot.



If you have diabetes, is it controlled?

- An A1C is a simple blood test that measures your average blood sugar levels over the past 3 months. Do you know your A1C?
- The A1C goal number for most people with diabetes is 7 or less.
- Wounds and ulcers stop healing when the daily sugar (blood glucose) number is 200 or more. Healing improves when the number is 180 or less. Do you check your sugars daily?



These things can also keep ulcers from healing

- Poor blood flow to your feet
- Smoking or alcohol use – past or present
- Nerve problems or peripheral neuropathy (nerve problems in your hands or feet)
- Liver and or kidney problems
- Not enough healthy food
- Weak immune system (a body system helps protect you from disease)
- Cancer

2. How long will it take to heal?

- Healing may take weeks or months.
- The time it takes depends on how often you are able to stay off your foot. (Remember, offloading means taking the weight off your foot.)
- It also depends on controlling your diabetes and/or other medical problems.

3. Shouldn't I be on antibiotics?

- Antibiotics should only be used if you have an infection. An ulcer is not an infection. But an ulcer can become infected (see #4).
- Antibiotics do not heal ulcers. Offloading, and taking care of your diabetes and other medical problems, heal ulcers.
- Never use antibiotics if you don't have an infection. This causes your body to become resistant to antibiotics, which means they won't work later, when you do have an infection.
- Taking antibiotics when not needed can also cause damage to your body, especially your kidneys.

4. How do I know if my ulcer is infected?

- It's important to know the signs and symptoms of infection. They are:
 - fever
 - more pain
 - more redness
 - more swelling
 - pus (a yellowish-white fluid formed in infected tissue).
- If you have a fever and 2 or more of these symptoms get help. Contact the CHILE clinic at 505-925-6526. Not taking care of an infection can lead to more serious problems.

5. I don't have pain. Why can't I walk?

- Most people with foot ulcers have nerve damage (peripheral neuropathy) which is usually caused by diabetes. It can be related to other medical conditions too. This nerve damage means you won't feel pain when you walk.
- That's what makes healing your ulcer so tricky. You don't have pain to remind you when you are walking that you are actually harming, not helping your ulcer.
- Instead of walking, use a walker, crutches, a wheelchair or a knee scooter. If you need one of these things, ask your doctor. They might be able to prescribe one for you. Some insurances will help you pay for them.



6. Wouldn't it be better to let the wound dry out?

❌ NO!

- Most diabetic and neuropathic ulcers are caused by damage in the tissues deep under the skin.
- Deep tissues need constant warm and damp conditions to work the way they are supposed to and to heal.
- Letting deep tissues be open to cold and dry conditions slows healing.
- Drying out the ulcer can also leave it open to bacteria which can lead to infection.

7. Why do you take off dead tissue and make my wound bleed? How does this help without making the wound bigger?

- Taking off dead tissue with a sharp instrument is called debriding. It needs to happen for most ulcers to heal. Thick callouses and dead skin have to be taken off so we can see your foot ulcer.
- Medical professionals can do this safely. Patients should not try to do this at home.
- Not removing dead tissues will slow healing and put you at risk for getting an infection.
- A small amount of bleeding can happen, but this does not cause the wound to get bigger.

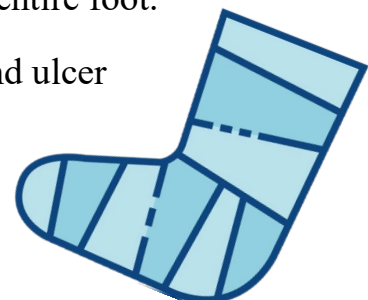


8. Why doesn't the wound need to be cleaned and bandaged every day?

- As we said before, ulcers are deep and need constant, warm, damp conditions to heal.
- If you take off the dressings every day, the ulcer is opened to cold, dry air.
- When the ulcer is in cold, dry air the healing stops. It takes several hours after the dressing is put back on to start the healing process again. This slows healing.
- It's best to leave the dressings on for several days to a week at a time.

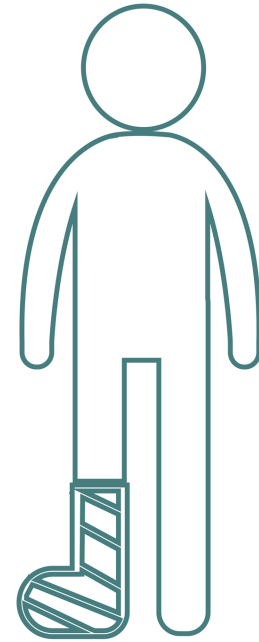
9. Why do you need to put on all the bulky dressings?

- Bulky dressings like the “football” dressing pad the entire foot.
- The padding helps reduce the pressure on the foot and ulcer when you are unable to offload.
- Even with the bulky dressing we advise you not to put weight on the foot with the ulcer.



10. Do you need to wrap my whole leg when the wound is only on my foot?

- Yes, if your doctor or therapist recommends it. Sometimes your foot and leg swell because of your ulcer. Swelling delays healing.
- A compression wrap or sock can help take away the swelling, but it only works when you put it on from the toes to the knee.
- If the wrap does not go high enough on your leg, it can move the swelling to another part of your leg. This can cause pain and sometimes create a new ulcer.
- There are times when compression can be dangerous. Your provider will let you know if you should not use a wrap.



11. Isn't there a medicine I can take to make the wound go away?

- Unfortunately, no.

12. Can you stitch the wound shut?

- There are many reasons why your ulcer cannot be stitched shut. One of the reasons is the risk of infection. All wounds are different. Your podiatrist or doctor is the best person to answer this question.

13. Why does the callus always grow back?

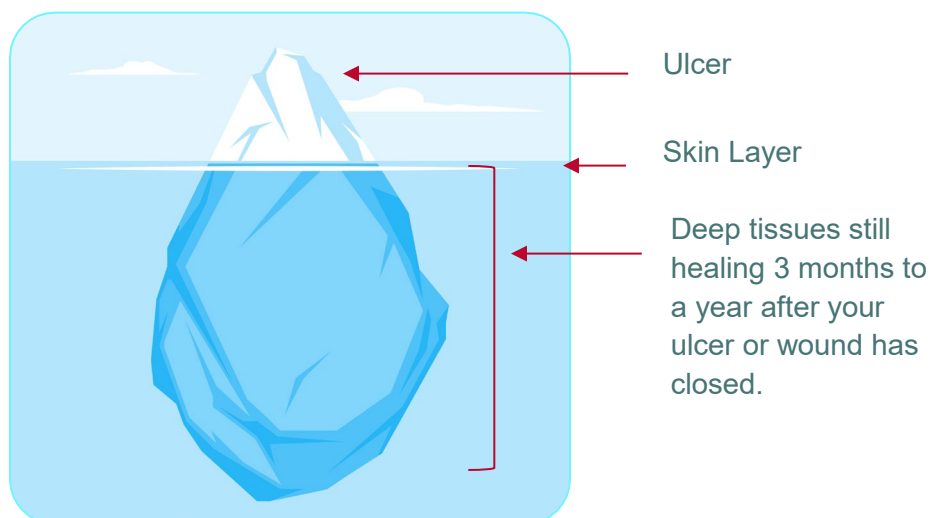
- Calluses are like weeds! They always grow back.
- Calluses happen more often and build up faster on the feet of people with diabetes. This is because of repeat rubbing and pressure under the foot.
- When your ulcer closes, it is very important to keep your callus thin and smooth. This will help keep ulcers from coming back. This is best done using a nail file and a good lotion or cream.
- Do not use sharp tools yourself. Medical staff are able to use sharp tools safely.
- When calluses are not managed, they thicken. When this happens, it is like walking with a rock in your shoe. Due to the lack of sensation you won't feel it. You may not know you have an ulcer until you notice drainage on your sock.



This why it is very important to inspect your feet daily!

14. When can I start walking again? When can I go back to work?

- When you no longer need dressings it means your ulcer is **closed, not fully healed.**
- This means that when your ulcer closes you want to be extra careful not to cause it to re-open by walking too much too soon. This is because the skin is very fragile and can break down easily.
- In the best case, you should continue offloading for at least a few more weeks after your ulcer closes. This will allow the tissues that have just closed to strengthen.
- Healing is still happening at least 3 months to a year after the ulcer is closed.



- Think of your ulcer as an iceberg. Healing is still going on underneath your skin even though the ulcer is closed.
- When healing is complete, the tissues are only 80% as strong as the original tissue. This means it takes less force to re-injure the tissues and cause a new ulcer. This is why it is very important that you check your feet every day.

Your Take Home Message

Diabetic and neuropathic foot ulcers can take several weeks or months to heal. Ulcers may take longer to heal if your blood sugar is high and if you put weight on your foot all the time. Being on a healthy diet, managing diabetes and other medical problems, and keeping pressure off your feet are the best ways to get your foot ulcers to heal.

We want you to succeed! We want to help you get back to doing the things you enjoy as soon as possible. We need your help to make this possible.

Healing your ulcer requires teamwork and you are the captain!



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