Foot care advice for rheumatoid patients with an ulcerated foot

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

The rheumatoid foot

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is a lifelong condition that can cause foot problems. Changes to your feet can be gradual and it is therefore important that you have your feet assessed at least once a year.

RA can affect:

- the circulation in your feet (ischaemia)
- the feeling/nerves in your feet (peripheral neuropathy)

You have been diagnosed with a foot ulcer. This means an area of skin has broken down and the tissue under it is now exposed.

In some people with RA the skin does not heal very well and is likely to develop an ulcer or infection after only a minor injury.

A foot ulcer can become infected and the infection may become severe. It is important that you look after your foot ulcer to prevent infection occurring.

If you smoke, you are strongly advised to stop. Smoking thickens your blood and narrows your arteries making it difficult for blood to pass through. This can lead to blockages and potential amputation.

As you have a foot ulcer, you will need regular podiatry treatment. Your podiatrist will discuss treatment plan with you to meet your needs.

Podiatry treatment for your foot ulcer

Foot ulcers are sometimes hidden beneath hard skin and can gather dead tissue around them. The Podiatrist will need to remove this to help your ulcer to heal. This can cause the ulcer to bleed a little but this is completely normal. Do not try to treat the ulcer yourself.
How to look after your foot ulcer

Re-dressing

Do not touch the dressing unless you have been properly shown how to remove and replace it and you have suitable dressings to replace the one you are changing. Continue to check other areas of your feet every day for any other problem areas or danger signs.

Danger signs

You should pay close attention to any of the following danger signs when checking your feet:

- Is there any new pain or throbbing?
- Does your foot feel hotter than usual?
- Are there any new areas of redness, inflammation or swelling?
- Is there any discharge?
- Is there a new smell from your foot?
- Do you have any flu-like symptoms?

Do not get the dressing wet

Getting the dressing wet may prevent healing or allow bacteria to enter the ulcer. This will cause more problems. Your podiatrist may give you a form to take to your GP to get a dressing protector on prescription. The dressing protector will allow you to have a bath or shower safely while keeping your dressing dry.

Moisturise the surrounding area of your feet

If your skin is dry, apply a moisturising cream every day, avoiding areas of broken skin and the areas between your toes.

Do not stand or walk on the affected foot

Avoid any unnecessary standing or walking. A wound cannot heal if it is constantly under pressure. Rest as much as possible and keep your foot up to help it to heal. Use anything your podiatrist recommends or gives you to relieve pressure on your foot.

Footwear

You may be asked to wear a cast, a device to relieve pressure or a special shoe until your ulcer has healed. If so, you should not wear any other footwear until your podiatrist tells you that you can wear your own shoes again.
Podiatry appointments

Always attend your appointments to have your ulcer treated. You may need regular appointments until the wound has healed. Your appointment may be with a district nurse, a practice nurse or your podiatrist.

Antibiotic treatment

You will be given antibiotics if there are signs of infection in the wound or in the nearby tissue. Report any problems you have with the antibiotics (rashes, nausea or diarrhoea); contact your GP immediately. Do not stop taking your antibiotics unless the person treating you, or your GP tells you to do so. Make sure you have enough antibiotics to finish the course so your treatment is not interrupted. If the infection is spreading, you may need to go to hospital. You may require antibiotics straight into your bloodstream to treat the infection quickly.

Operations

Sometimes, if an infection becomes severe, you may need a small operation to clean out the wound. If an infection is very severe, an amputation may be needed to save healthy parts of the foot. If your circulation is reduced, you may be referred for a small operation to increase blood supply to the ulcerated area.

Contact us

If you discover any more problems, or if you are concerned about the treatment of your foot ulcer, please contact your local Podiatry Department, practice nurse, GP or rheumatologist for advice immediately.

Individual advice:

Local contact numbers:

Podiatry head office: 01392 35612
Further information

Podiatry Admin Office
Tel: 01392 356 126
Address: Podiatry department, Newcourt House, Newcourt Drive, Old Rydon Lane, Exeter, EX2 7JQ

Useful Links

Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists – www.feetforlife.org
National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (UK) – www.rheumatoid.org.uk
Arthritis Research UK – www.arthritisresearchUK.org
National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE), Rheumatoid Arthritis

References

1. Arthritis Research UK, Patient Advice-Rheumatoid Arthritis, Reactive Arthritis and Palindromic-Rheumatism
   Available From:

2. National Institute for Clinical Excellence Guidelines for Rheumatoid Arthritis, CG79 and Quality Standard 33,
   Available From:
   http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs33/chapter/introduction-and-overview

3. Guidelines for the management of foot health for people with Rheumatoid Arthritis, developed by Northwest Podiatry Services Clinical Effectiveness Group – Rheumatology, University of Salford
   Available From:
   http://usir.salford.ac.uk/11321/6/North_West_Clinical_Effectiveness_Group_-_guidelines_for_the_management_of_the_RA_foot_2010.pdf
PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple. Alternatively, it may be possible for us to arrange an appointment in your area.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of the ward staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

‘Patient Opinion’ comments forms are on all wards or online at www.patientopinion.org.uk.

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple
Devon EX31 4JB
Tel. 01271 322577
www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk

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