

## Lower-limb leg ulcer and well-leg service

### 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.

Patient	Name	
	Address	
	Tel No	
Leg ulcer clinic	Name	
	Address	
	Tel No	
	Tel No	Out of hours
GP	Name	
	Address	
	Tel No	
Any other professionals involved in care	Name	
	Address	
	Tel No	

## What is the lower-limb leg ulcer and well-leg service?

The lower limb leg ulcer and well leg service is a leg ulcer service providing specialist clinics and well-leg social groups throughout northern Devon. The leg ulcer clinic is a specialist service, where the nurses perform assessments and carry out the treatment to provide leg ulcer care. All the treatment provided is based upon the latest national guidelines and leg ulcer research. Our approach is to work with you in a way that supports the best outcomes for you.

## Who is eligible for the service?

The service is a specialist leg ulcer clinic for those over the age of 18 who have:

- A non-healing wound of 4 weeks or longer
- A recurrence of a previous leg ulcer

Referrals to the clinic are accepted from healthcare professionals, self-referrals, voluntary agencies, families and carers.

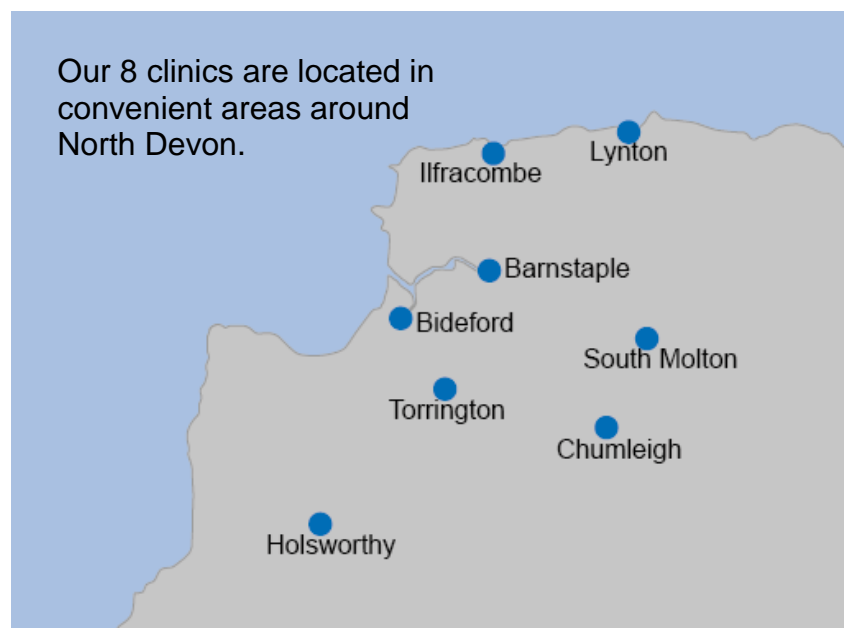
Once referred into the service, a member of the administration team will make contact with you and arrange a convenient clinic appointment.

## Where are the clinics?

Your ulcer will be treated at one of Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust's (NDHT) leg ulcer clinics which run from 8 different locations across northern Devon. You are welcome to attend the clinic which is most convenient for you.

The clinics are run from the following locations:

- Bideford Hospital
- Holsworthy Hospital
- Torrington Hospital
- South Molton Hospital
- Wallingbrook Health Group, Chulmleigh
- Lynton Health Centre
- Ilfracombe Community Hospital
- Rosebank Day Centre, Barnstaple



Please let the clinic staff know if you have any issues with transportation or if you cannot make an appointment as they may be able to support you in some way.

## What is a leg ulcer?

A leg ulcer is an area of broken skin below the knee that has been present for more than 2 weeks and is not healing. There are many different causes of leg ulcers but usually an ulcer can be categorised into either a venous ulcer, an arterial ulcer or a mixed ulcer.

### Venous leg ulcer

This is caused by poor blood return from the legs to the heart. The veins in the legs carry blood back to the heart with the help of the calf muscle and the movement of the calf and foot muscle during exercise. The veins have a one-way valve to ensure the blood flows upwards towards your heart. Damage to the valves in the veins can lead to the blood building up instead of being pumped back to the heart. As a result the pressure in the veins increases. This can lead to swelling of the ankle and leg, pain, aching in the leg, itchy skin, and colour changes in the skin on the leg. Eventually a leg ulcer can occur.

### Arterial ulcer

This is caused by poor blood supply from the heart to the legs. The arteries supply blood down to the legs and feet. If the arteries become narrowed, the blood circulation will be reduced and the leg will be starved of nutrients and oxygen so the skin will begin to break down.

### Mixed ulcer

This is caused by having elements of both poor blood return and poor blood supply to the legs.

## Treatment at a leg ulcer clinic

At the first appointment a full specialist assessment will take place including a test to measure your Ankle Brachial Pressure index (ABPI).

### What is an ABPI?

An ABPI is a calculation that shows how well blood is flowing in the limbs. The ABPI is measured using a non-invasive machine which compares blood pressure in the ankles to blood pressure in the arms. This test helps the nurse categorise the type of leg ulcer, which helps aid the decision around which treatments are most suitable. The nurse will then work with you to formulate a treatment plan. Venous and mixed ulcers may be treated with compression therapy to improve blood return. This compression therapy may be in the form of compression hosiery or compression bandages. The bandages/hosiery give support to your calf muscle and damaged valves in your veins. The bandages/hosiery help the blood to be squeezed out of your leg back up to your heart. The compression bandages/hosiery should feel comfortable, firm and supportive but not too tight. Arterial ulcers CANNOT be treated with compression therapy.

### What are the benefits of compression treatment?

- Help to heal your ulcer
- Help the blood flow the correct way
- Reduce the swelling in your leg

- Help reduce the pain in your leg
- Help to reduce the itching in your skin

### **What are the risks of compression treatment?**

If you experience any of the following symptoms, you should remove the compression bandages/hosiery and contact the clinic or the out-of-hours service immediately.

- Pins and needles sensation in your toes
- Blue, white or dusky coloured toes
- Swelling of your toes
- Unusual pain in your leg/foot or toes
- Numbness or reduced sensation
- Excessive itching, burning or irritation
- Slippage of the bandage/ill-fitting hosiery.

If you have any leakage through the bandages/dressings, you must contact your nurse.

If you do not experience any of the above, your bandages should be left in place just as the nurse applied it. Fiddling with the dressing/ bandages can delay healing.

### **Specialist services**

Following your full assessment there may be a need for a referral to another service in addition to the leg ulcer service. Mixed and arterial ulcers will be referred to the vascular team for assessment and also the leg ulcer nurse specialist. The service is able to refer to a wide range of health professionals if needed.

### **The risks of not getting treatment**

If your leg ulcer is not treated then it may heal slowly or not heal at all. This can result in your symptoms becoming worse and the ulcer could possibly become infected which would require further treatment.

### **Signs of infection**

- Redness or swelling around the ulcer site
- Increased and unpleasant discharge from the wound
- Increased odour from the wound
- Increased pain

Please seek **immediate** medical attention if you have any of the below symptoms:

- New redness or discolouration on your leg
- A high temperature (fever)
- A rash or flu like symptoms
- Worsening pain
- Bleeding heavily (**apply pressure, elevate limb and call 999 immediately**)

## How long will it take to heal my ulcer?

With appropriate treatment some ulcers can heal in a few weeks while others can still take months or years. The key to success is following the instructions given by the nurse. There are also many other things that you can do to help.

## What can I do to help?

### Keep all appointments

It is important you attend all your appointments. If you are unable to attend your appointment please contact your leg clinic to rearrange. Anyone who has a wound must be reviewed at least once a week.

### Control any pain from your leg ulcer

Leg ulcers can be extremely painful, therefore if you are experiencing pain from your leg ulcer, it is important that you take any prescribed painkillers regularly and not exceed the recommended dose. If the pain is becoming worse or the painkillers are not helpful then please consult your nurse/doctor.

### Manage your weight

Extra weight can put extra pressure on the veins in the legs, so managing your weight can help towards the healing of your ulcer.

### Eat healthily

Eat a healthy, well balanced diet including fresh fruit and vegetables. This will help your wound to heal and manage your weight.

### Stop smoking

Cigarettes contain nicotine, which narrows your veins and arteries and damages your blood circulation, making an ulcer more likely to develop. If you need help to stop smoking, please discuss with your nurse.

### Stay hydrated

It is important to be well hydrated as this will help with wound healing. Avoid caffeine and drink alcohol within recommended government limits. Caffeine and alcohol can make you pass more urine and will increase your risk of dehydration.

## Elevate your legs

If you are advised to rest with your legs up, you should elevate your legs so your ankles are above your heart. This elevation helps reduce the fluid in your legs and aids healing.

## Wear comfortable footwear

Ensure your shoes are not too tight as this can lead to skin damage and a foot ulcer, or any bandages you may have being pushed out of place. Please ensure you bring appropriate footwear to your clinic appointment. Please consult the nurse if you don't have shoes that fit comfortably over your dressings.

## Do not interfere with your bandages

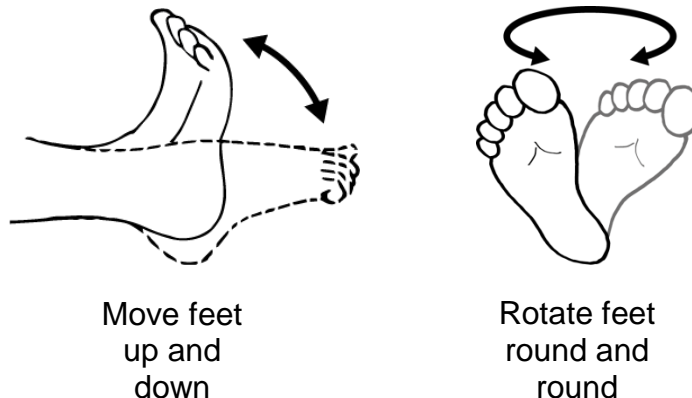
If you are concerned about your bandages, contact the nurse immediately. Do not cut your bandages or hosiery. Do not force your feet into shoes; you may need a bigger shoe. Your nurse can help advise you with this.

## Care for your skin

Ensure your skin is moisturised with an unscented moisturiser or emollient. Observe your legs, note any skin changes and report them to your nurse. **Be aware: there is a fire risk with all moisturisers and skin creams. Do not keep or use these near a naked flame or fire.**

## Walk or exercise regularly

Walking or regular exercise will help keep the calf muscles pump working properly. If you are immobile, perform foot and ankle exercises as shown below.



## Avoid injury

Be careful not to bang your legs on furniture or sharp objects. Any injury may cause a wound which may take a long time to heal.

## Avoid standing or sitting in one position for long periods

If this cannot be avoided, activate the calf muscle pump by taking the weight off your heels and standing on your toes and rolling back on to your heels with toes off the ground. This will encourage the blood supply back to the heart.

## When your ulcer heals

Once your ulcer has healed you will be invited to an appointment for an ABPI test and reassessment within 11 months. After your ulcer is healed, you may need to use some sort of compression on your leg to reduce the risk of the ulcer returning. Your nurse will advise you on this.

## Well leg service

When your leg ulcer has healed you will be asked if you would like to attend a NDHT well leg social group. These groups offer social support to help you keep your legs healthy and avoid further ulcers. The well leg service will be delivered by volunteers and voluntary organisations with support from NDHT community nurses and health care assistants. Members can expect a friendly welcome, chat with other members, share experiences and have a cup of tea.

### **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](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## 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 staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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