

Patient Information Leaflet

# **Understanding your Chronic Wound**

A large, decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, wavy lines in various shades of blue, ranging from light to dark. The lines flow from the left side of the page towards the right, creating a sense of movement and depth. This graphic occupies the lower half of the page, partially overlapping the text area.

In this leaflet Health Care Professional (HCP) refers to any member of the team involved in your wound care. This can include treatment room or practice nurse, community, ward or clinic nurse, GP or hospital doctor, podiatrist etc.

# Chronic Wounds and Dressings

## What is a chronic wound?

A wound with slow progress towards healing or shows delayed healing. This may be due to underlying issues such as:

- Poor blood flow and less oxygen getting to the wound
- Other health conditions such as diabetes
- Poor diet, smoking, pressure on the wound e.g. from footwear or trauma

## Can my wound be left open to the air?

No, the evidence shows that wounds heal better when the surface is kept moist (not too wet or dry). The moisture provides the correct environment to aid your wound to heal.

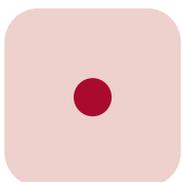
If you leave your wound open to the air, there is an increased risk of infection from contamination with debris and an increased risk of trauma to the wound.

## Does my dressing need changed daily?

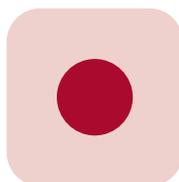
Not usually, your HCP will explain how often it needs changed. This will depend on the level of fluid leaking from your wound. Some dressings can be left in place up to a week.

Most wounds have a slight odour, but if a wound smells bad after you have cleansed it, it could be a sign that something is wrong. See section on wound infection.

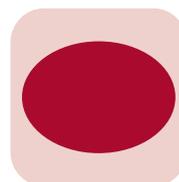
Your dressing may indicate that it needs changed when the dark area in the centre gets close to the edge of the dressing pad. The dark area is fluid from your wound, this is normal. It will be dry to touch. Let your HCP know if your dressing needs changed before your next visit or appointment is due.



Do not  
Change



Do not  
Change



Change  
the  
dressing

## **Does my wound need cleansed when the dressing is changed?**

Only wounds with dead tissue and excess fluid need to be cleansed at each dressing change. Occasionally, if dressings stick they may be soaked off. Wounds that have healthy tissue or new skin do not need cleaned as this removes the nutrients and growth factors needed for healing. Surrounding skin may need cleaned.

## **Can I shower or have a bath with the dressing in place?**

No. Your dressing must be kept dry at all times. Your HCP will issue you with a prescription for a Sealtight device which allows you to shower safely without getting your dressing wet.

## **What do I do if my dressing falls off?**

Your HCP will explain what to do if this happens. They may give you spare dressings which you or a family member/carer can apply.

Always wash your hands before and after doing anything with your wound to reduce the risk of infection. And reapply your dressing as agreed with your HCP.

## **Wound Infection and Antimicrobial Dressings**

### **How can I tell if my wound is infected?**

If you have one or more of the following signs this may indicate infection:

- Increased swelling
- More redness around the wound than normal
- Pain worse than normal
- Skin around the wound feels hot to touch
- Increased fluid leaking from the wound
- Changes to wound fluid e.g. green, thicker, cloudy, foul smelling

Some conditions and medications can make you more likely to develop a wound infection, e.g. diabetes, poor circulation, patients taking immuno-suppressant therapies etc.

## Sepsis

If you develop the following symptoms, it is essential that you seek urgent medical advice:

- Raised temperature
- Flu like symptoms
- Generally unwell
- Nausea and vomiting
- Reduced urine output

**If you are concerned or symptoms develop quickly contact your HCP, or out of hours service, as soon as possible. You can find contact details for your local team at the end of this leaflet.**

## Will I need antibiotics?

Not all wound infections will need antibiotics, your doctor or HCP will make this decision. They may decide to use a specialist wound cleansing product or an antimicrobial wound dressing to reduce the level of bacteria instead of, or as well as, antibiotics.

If you are prescribed antibiotics, it is important that you tell your podiatrist immediately if you are unable to take them.

You must take your antibiotics as prescribed and be mindful to complete the course.

## What is an antimicrobial wound dressing?

Antimicrobials are agents that kill bacteria or stop their spread. Some have the active ingredient within the dressing and some come as creams, gels, ointments or powders.

Your podiatrist will decide on the most appropriate form of dressing for your wound.

## How long will I need the antimicrobial dressing for?

The Podiatrist will monitor the wound at each dressing change to check for signs it is improving with treatment. The effect of the antimicrobial dressing will be reviewed after two weeks and future treatment will depend on:

1. If there are no signs of infection, your HCP will stop using the antimicrobial dressings and change to a standard dressing.
2. If the wound is improving, treatment will continue and be checked at least weekly.
3. If the wound is not improving, your HCP may change to another antimicrobial dressing, continue to monitor closely, review health conditions, and/or refer to a specialist service.

## **Is there anything else I can do to help my wound heal?**

### **Pressure Relief**

You may be asked by your podiatrist or orthotist to wear a special boot or shoe to reduce pressures on your foot and to offer protection from trauma until your ulcer has healed. It is essential that you wear this device as advised to give your wound the best possible chance of healing.

Make sure the shoe you wear on the other foot fits well and allows space and support without rubbing. Your podiatrist will advise you on this. If you have been issued with prescription footwear then this is the shoe you should wear on the unaffected foot.

### **1) Rest and Exercise**

To encourage healing you need a balance of rest and exercise. Walking encourages the blood flow to your wound. For some patients, resting with your leg up will reduce the risk of swelling to the area. Your HCP will advise you on the right level of activity for you. It is important that you wear the boot/sandal you were provided with for any activity.

### **2) Pain relief**

Remember to take painkillers as prescribed or directed by your GP. This will manage your pain and allow you to move more easily.

### **3) Nutrition**

A healthy and varied diet helps wound healing. This should include vegetables, fruit and proteins such as nuts, fish, meat, pulses, cheese or eggs.

#### 4) Stop smoking

Even one cigarette reduces the blood flow and oxygen to the wound and stops nutrients being absorbed. It can also increase your risk of infection. You are four times more likely to be successful giving up smoking with professional help. Ask your HCP about 'stop smoking' services or you can contact Quit Your Way free by phoning an advisor on 0800 84 84 84. For further information please check the NHS Inform website: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/nhs-services/helplines/quit-your-way-scotland>

#### Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns?

During working hours contact	
Name: Podiatry Hub	Number: 0141 531 6261 01475 501 206 (Please circle)

If you have urgent concerns out of hours phone NHS 24 on 111.

#### Keeping your Appointment

If you cannot keep your appointment, or have been given one that is unsuitable, please change it by phoning the number on your appointment letter. Your call will give someone else the chance to be seen and will help us keep waiting times to a minimum.

#### Interpretation and Translation

This leaflet may be made available in a larger print, Braille or your community language.



