Orthotics4U.com | Dr. Milton J. Stern, DPM
Patient Education

FOOT ULCERS

Causes, Symptoms, and Treatments





WHAT ARE FOOT ULCERS?

Foot ulcers are open sores or wounds that develop on the feet, often associated with diabetes, neuropathy, poor circulation, pressure, friction, or injury.

Untreated ulcers may lead to serious infection and complications, including hospitalization or amputation.

CAUSES OF FOOT ULCERS

- **Diabetes / Neuropathy** – Loss of sensation in the feet can lead to unnoticed injuries.
- **Poor Circulation** – Reduced blood flow impairs healing.
- **Pressure and Friction** – Ill-fitting shoes or prolonged pressure on specific areas can break down the skin.
- **Infection** – Bacterial or fungal infections can cause or worsen ulcers.
- **Trauma or Injury** – Cuts, blisters, or bruises that are untreated can develop into ulcers.

COMMON SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- **Open wound** – A visible sore on the skin.
- **Redness and swelling** – Around the ulcerated area.
- **Drainage** – Pus or fluid may ooze from the wound.
- **Odor** – Infected ulcers may produce a foul smell.
- **Pain** – Discomfort may be present, but pain can be absent in individuals with neuropathy (loss of sensation).

DIAGNOSIS



Clinical Examination – Assess the size, depth, and severity of the ulcer.



Imaging Tests – X-ray or MRI when indicated to look for infection or bone involvement.



Wound Culture – When indicated, to determine the type of infection.

TREATMENT OPTIONS



Non-Surgical Treatments

- **Wound care** – Cleaning and dressing the ulcer to prevent infection.
- **Debridement** – Removal of dead tissue to promote healing (by a clinician).
- **Offloading** – Special footwear, casts, or crutches to reduce pressure on the ulcer.
- **Antibiotics** – To treat or prevent infection (when prescribed).
- **Advanced options** – Negative-pressure wound therapy (wound VAC) and skin substitutes (e.g., natural, synthetic, acellular, or cellular) in selected cases.



Surgical Treatments

- **Drainage of infections** – Remove abscesses or infected tissue.
- **Vascular surgery** – Improve blood flow to promote healing.
- **Amputation** – Rarely needed, and only in severe cases to save a limb or life.

PREVENTION



- Control **blood sugar** levels to prevent diabetic complications.
- Inspect your **feet** daily for cuts, sores, or other changes.
- Wear properly fitting, protective shoes with good cushioning and support.
- **Never walk barefoot**, even at home.

⚠ **A new foot wound—especially with diabetes, poor circulation, redness, drainage, odor, or swelling—needs prompt medical evaluation. Do not self-treat or delay.**



HOW ORTHOTICS HELP

- **Redistribute pressure** away from high-risk areas, such as the ball of the foot, heel, and toes.
- **Reduce friction and shearing** forces that can break down the skin.
- **Protect vulnerable areas** and help prevent new ulcers.
- Assist with offloading when used as part of a comprehensive treatment plan.

Orthotics alone do not heal an ulcer. Active foot ulcers require clinician-directed wound care and offloading to promote healing.