

Take a load off your feet: how offloading can help healing

If you have a diabetes-related foot ulcer, it has a better chance of healing if it is not constantly exposed to pressure. As a result, your healthcare professional or podiatrist may advise offloading. Here we explain what it is and how it can help you foot to heal.



Put simply, offloading is taking the pressure off a certain point on the foot (usually a bony part like a corn or bunion) or an ulcer and spreading the load evenly.

This allows healing to take place and can also help prevent damage occurring elsewhere. Diabetes-

related foot ulcers are often caused by pressure building up on a certain part of the foot and this pressure can restrict the blood flow to that area, resulting in a wound forming. By removing the pressure and distributing it evenly over the foot, the circulation is restored and it can supply the wound with everything it needs to heal.

Which offloading device?

The choice of which offloading device to wear will depend on the severity of your ulcer, its location, the volume of exudate (wound fluid) coming from the wound and if there is any signs or symptoms of infection.

Your healthcare professional will also take into consideration your general mobility and balance, what help you have at home and how involved you can be in your care, if you want to be.

There are three main ways that offloading can be achieved by:

- Using a knee-high cast or boot which will either be non-removable or removable
- Using special shoes, boots or footwear
- Inserting special shoe inserts (such as orthotics) with cut out areas where the ulcer or pressure point is.

Wearing your offloading device


If your offloading device is removable, you should try to wear it every time you put weight on your foot. This will help to distribute pressure from your ulcer to give it a chance to heal. On removal of the device, you should continue to

check both feet as part as your daily foot care routine, or as instructed by your healthcare professional.

Look out for any evidence of the device rubbing your foot, or the formation of any new wounds, the presence of swelling, pain or skin discolouration. You can read tips for caring for and inspecting your feet on pages 12–13.

If your offloading device is non-removable, keep a close eye on your toes, looking for any sign of the toes changing colour or becoming discoloured. If this happens, report it to your healthcare professional or podiatrist immediately, as it could indicate a problem with your circulation. Wearing a device on one leg or foot can sometimes put more pressure on the other foot, so make sure you have the correct footwear to prevent any problems arising. You may also find that using sticks or crutches helps keep the weight off your foot.

Put your feet up when you can

Make sure you take plenty of rest and take the pressure off both feet on a regular basis. 



Andrew Sharpe, Advanced Podiatrist, comments:

‘Offloading is an important component for both the prevention and treatment of diabetes-related foot ulcers. It helps to protect the wound from undergoing further damage while it heals.’