



ARTERIAL (ISCHEMIC) ULCERS

Overview

An arterial ulcer is typically found on the lower leg or foot and is often located over the top of the toes or the ankle. Arterial ulcers be quite painful and can be difficult to heal because the blood flow (circulation) is partially or completely blocked.

Early intervention and proper treatment are essential to help prevent complications and increase your chances of healing. To treat an arterial ulcer, blood flow will need to be restored. Your provider will discuss options that may be considered as part of your personal plan of care.

Causes

Clogged arteries are the most common cause of arterial ulcers. When your artery is clogged, it decreases the size of the blood vessel and amount of blood that reaches the lower leg and foot. Without adequate blood flow, the tissues in your legs do not receive enough nutrients and oxygen.

The lack of nutrients can cause cells to die, damaging the tissue. Damaged tissue that does not get enough blood flow also tends to heal more slowly.

Other causes include:

- Previous injuries and other conditions can cause the skin to become inflamed and fragile, which can also lead to poor circulation.
- Diseases that cause inflammation, such as lupus
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol levels
- Chronic kidney disease
- Blockage of lymph vessels, which causes fluid to build up in the legs
- Smoking

Common Signs and Symptoms

- Cool or cold skin
- Reduced or absent pulse
- Legs become pale and cool when raised
- Pain
 - › Pain at night, relieved by “dangling” of legs
 - › Pain with walking and exercise
- Skin may be shiny, thin, tight, hairless and/or dry
- Thick and brittle toenails.
- Non-healing wound
- Wounds (ulcers) are dry and appear dry or black (colors may vary)

Treatment and Care

After a thorough evaluation, which may include diagnostic testing, your provider will discuss a treatment plan with you. Treatments vary based on individuals, but may include:

- Regular exercise, such as walking (to help improve your circulation). Consult your provider before starting an exercise routine.
- Your provider will also encourage you to eat a balanced, nutritious diet. Foods high in protein, vitamins, and minerals are important for healing and maintaining healthy skin.
- Keeping the wound clean and bandaged to prevent infection.
- Your provider will tell you how often you need to change the dressing. Keep the dressing clean and dry.

Prevention

Your role in both preventing new ulcers and healing current ulcers is a critical piece of the care plan. Your provider may order additional test and procedures to improve your blood flow but your active participation will make the difference.

- Check your feet and legs every day. Check the tops and bottoms, ankles, heels, and between your toes. Look for changes in color and red or sore areas.
- Wear shoes that fit properly and do not rub or put pressure on your feet.
- Wear socks that fit. Socks that are too big can bunch up in your shoes and cause rubbing or the skin, which can lead to a sore.
- Try not to sit or stand too long in one position.
- Protect your feet from the cold.
- DO NOT walk barefoot. Protect your feet from injury.
- DO NOT wear compression stockings or wraps unless told to by your provider. These may restrict blood flow.
- DO NOT soak your feet in hot water.

Preventative Measures

- Quit smoking. Nicotine is a “vasoconstrictor”, which means it constricts or narrows blood vessels. When blood vessels constrict, blood flow is slowed or blocked depriving your wound from receiving the nutrients and oxygen necessary for healing. Your health care team knows it is very difficult to stop this habit so please speak with them to explore options to cut back or quit smoking.

- If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar level under control.
- Manage your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Exercise as much as you can. Staying active can help with blood flow.
- Eat healthy foods and get plenty of sleep at night.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.

Important

If you notice any of the following symptoms, notify your provider immediately:

- You have a sudden increase in swelling, or notice that your dressing or stocking feels too tight
- You have a fever of 101 degrees F or higher
- You have an increase in leg pain
- You notice an increase in drainage or a foul odor from the ulcer site

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL:
Silver Cross Wound Healing and Hyperbaric
Medicine

815.300.5997

1851 Silver Cross Blvd., Ste 130, Pavilion D
New Lenox, IL 60451

silvercross.org