

Patient Information

Chronic Wound Care

Tissue Viability Service



Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to give information and advice to patients who have a chronic wound.

What is a chronic wound?

A wound is any break in the skin or deep tissue. Normally the skin heals quickly on its own. Wounds that don't heal easily are called **chronic wounds**; they require special care to heal. Chronic wounds can result from:

- surgical wounds that reopen
- skin that breaks down when there's too much pressure over a bony area (pressure ulcers)
- injury to the feet or legs from poor circulation (arterial or venous ulcers)
- loss of circulation and feeling due to diabetes (diabetic ulcers)

Photography

A photograph may be required of your wound whilst in our care. We will arrange for a clinical photographer to take a photograph; we will ask for your written permission beforehand.

If you are admitted with a chronic wound and it is not the reason for your admission:

The nurses will aim to follow the dressing plan you already have from the community. The nurse may need to contact the community nurses for further information. Some of the dressings that are used in the community may not be available in the hospital, so the nurses will use an equivalent product that we have available in the hospital.

If the wound is the reason for your admission:

A ward nurse will do an initial assessment of your wound and instigate a plan of care. They may do this in conjunction with the medical team and/or the Tissue Viability clinical nurse specialist, or another healthcare professional, i.e. podiatrist.

Dressings and/or treatment

The dressings and/or treatments that are chosen by the nurses are based on the initial assessment of your wound. They are designed specifically to help your wound to heal. Your nurse will discuss with you the type of dressing chosen for your wound. The dressings and/or treatments may change during your 'plan of care' based on the nurses' on-going assessments of your wound.

Frequency of dressing change

The number of times you will need your dressing changed is dependent on the type of dressing used and your wound. Many dressings have advanced wound care technology that creates a warm and moist healing environment which helps the wound to heal.

Unless the dressing is leaking, the dressing should stay on for as long as possible and many can remain in place for up to 7 days. If dressings are changed unnecessarily it interrupts the healing process as it changes the temperature of the wound and may delay healing. The dressing may change in appearance while it is covering your wound; this is normal and indicates the dressing is working properly.

Ongoing evaluation

At each dressing change the nurse will decide if your plan of care needs to change and they will discuss any proposed changes with you. If you have any questions about the care of your wound, your nurse will be happy to discuss and answer your questions to support you.

Pain

Your wound may cause pain; you may need to take regular pain relief tablets. If you are in pain, you may not want to move or eat and then healing will be delayed. Some pain relief tablets can lead to constipation so please speak to your doctor or nurse if you have any concerns.

Infection

Try not to touch your wound as this can make a wound infection much more likely. However, if you have to touch your wound to care for it, always wash your hands before and after touching the wound area.

If you experience any of the following symptoms, please tell your nurse:

- High temperature (fever)
- Increased redness, pain or swelling around the wound
- An offensive smell from the wound
- The wound feels hot
- Thick yellowy discharge leaking from the dressing
- Feeling generally unwell

Eating to help you heal

Having a wound puts extra demands on your body. Good nutrition is necessary for healing. During the healing process the body needs increased amounts of calories, protein, vitamins A and C, and zinc. Wounds heal faster if you get enough of the right foods and if you don't, they heal more slowly. Try to eat a healthy well balanced diet including protein (meat, fish, pulses, cheese and eggs), fruit and vegetables.

Discharge

When you are discharged you will be referred to the community nurses to either continue the care they were already giving you, or to see you as a new patient if the wound has developed whilst in hospital.