

# WHAT IS AN ARTERIAL ULCER?



Arteries are the channels that carry blood from the heart to your body's tissues. When the arteries in your leg or foot are narrowed or blocked, blood flow is interrupted. This can lead to arterial ulcers. Arterial ulcers are also caused by damage to small blood vessels when you have had diabetes or other blood circulation problems for a long time.

## How did you get an arterial ulcer?

Arterial leg ulcers are caused by poor blood circulation as a result of narrowed arteries. Your tissues receive oxygen and nutrients from the blood. If you accidentally bump your leg, it can develop into an arterial ulcer.

### Common causes include:

- » Smoking
- » High blood pressure
- » Diabetes
- » Arthritis (rheumatoid arthritis)
- » History of leg ulcers
- » Coronary heart disease
- » Atherosclerosis (fatty deposits in your arteries)

## What does it mean to you?

You may notice that your legs or feet do not have much hair, are cold most of the time, and your skin is smooth and shiny. Your skin may have a red or purple appearance and be cool to the touch. The muscle in your calf may be getting smaller. Your wound may be very painful. The pain in your leg, foot, or ulcer may get worse when you raise your leg.

## What should you do about it?

**It is very important to follow the directions given to you by your doctor or nurse.**

Your doctor or nurse may perform tests to look at the blood flow in your legs and feet. If some blood is getting to your legs and feet, the doctor or nurse will prescribe a bandage that will keep your wound moist. It is important to keep your legs and feet warm and protected from injury. Keep your legs pointed down so that gravity will help your blood flow freely.

If the blood flow in your legs is not very good, your doctor may recommend that you see a surgeon who will try to improve your circulation with surgery. If surgery is not a possibility, it is important to keep the wound clean, dry and free from infection.

## Helpful hints

- » Stop smoking
- » Lose weight if you are overweight
- » Reduce the amount of fat in your diet
- » Exercise as much as possible
- » Avoid injuries to your feet and legs
- » Make sure shoes fit correctly and are not too small
- » Keep your feet warm
- » Examine your feet and legs daily for any changes in color or the development of wounds

*This document is not intended to treat, diagnose or prescribe. The information is for educational purposes only and is not meant to take the place of a consultation with a licensed healthcare professional.*

### How to change your bandage:

- 1** Wash your hands with soap and water.
- 2** Collect the supplies you will need.
- 3** Get into a comfortable position to change your bandage.
- 4** Place a large plastic bag or cover on your bed or chair to protect it.

### How to remove your bandage:

- 5** Place your hand into a small clean plastic bag.
- 6** Grasp the old bandage with your bag-covered hand and gently remove your bandage.
- 7** Turn the bag inside out over the old bandage.
- 8** Close the bag tightly and throw it away.

### How to examine your arterial ulcer:

- 9** Look at your ulcer. As the wound heals, it will slowly become smaller and drain less. New tissue is pink or red and may look lumpy or shiny. **Do not disturb this tissue. Clean it gently.**
- 10** **Tell your doctor or nurse if your wound gets bigger, if it has more drainage, if it is more painful or swollen, or if it is not better in 2 to 4 weeks.**

### Bandage your wound *(doctor or nurse instructions):*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Doctor or nurse contact information:

---

---

*This document is not intended to treat, diagnose or prescribe. The information is for educational purposes only and is not meant to take the place of a consultation with a licensed healthcare professional.*