

Patient/Resident Reference Guide

# Diabetic Foot Ulcers: Care for Patients in All Settings





### **Quality standards outline what high-quality care looks like.**

They focus on conditions where there are large variations in how care is delivered, or where there are gaps between the care provided in Ontario and the care patients should receive.

This guide addresses variations and gaps in care in Ontario that need attention when it comes to managing diabetic foot ulcers. It is based on the best available evidence and was created in partnership with patients, their families, and health care providers.

**Diabetic foot ulcers** are open wounds that can be very painful and can lead to infections and amputation. High-quality foot care is important for people with diabetes, a condition that causes high blood sugar levels and can lead to serious complications.

This guide is for people living with diabetes, their families, and other caregivers to help you know what to ask for when receiving treatment and to make sure you receive the highest-quality care.

### **If you or someone you care about has a diabetic foot ulcer or is at risk of developing one...**

You can use this guide to help you and your health care professionals develop a care plan that works for you. You should use this information to become aware of what high-quality care looks like and to ask informed questions about your care.

Care plans can be very different for each person, so it is important to work closely with your health care professionals.

Here are some things to consider.

## **Understanding and Planning Your Care**

### **If You Have Diabetes**

- You should be assessed for your risk of developing a foot ulcer when you are diagnosed with diabetes and at least once a year after that.
- You and your family or caregiver should be taught how to take care of your feet. You should also be taught how to check for foot problems such as ulcers, and who to contact for help.

### **If You Have a Diabetic Foot Ulcer**

- If you have a diabetic foot ulcer, you should be referred to a team of care providers. If you have major complications, you should be seen within 24 hours by a team that delivers emergency services and then be referred to a team of health care professionals for ongoing care.

- If you have a diabetic foot ulcer or other foot problem, you should have a full assessment. Your health care team will want to learn more about your health history, concerns, and preferences. They will also examine your legs and feet, including any wounds you have.
- Your health care professional should work with you to develop a care plan that reflects your needs, concerns, and preferences. A care plan is a written document that you have developed with your health care professional. It describes your goals for your care, the care you will receive, and who will provide it.
- As part of your care plan, you should be offered ways to take pressure off your foot so it can heal, and to prevent future ulcers, too. These methods could include a non-removable cast, a cast walker, or special shoes.
- To help your wound heal, you should have dead skin, callus, and debris removed (this is called debridement) if you and your health care professional determine that it is necessary and appropriate.
- If your wound is infected, you should receive treatment, including antibiotics and non-antimicrobial interventions.
- If you have a suspected deep/surrounding tissue or systemic infection, you should have an urgent assessment within 24 hours and treatment with antibiotics.



- Your health care team will determine whether your wound can heal or not. You should have a dressing that keeps the wound moist if it can heal, or dry if it cannot heal.
- You should receive care from a team of health care professionals who have been trained to care for people with diabetic foot ulcers or foot complications.
- When you change health care settings (for example, you return home after being cared for in a hospital), your health care team or health care professional should work with you to make sure that important information is transferred with you, and that you are connected to the supports you need.

Everybody is different, and some statements may not apply in your situation. If you have questions about your care, **it is important to speak with your health care professional.**

## Looking for more information?

Please contact us at [qualitystandards@hqontario.ca](mailto:qualitystandards@hqontario.ca) or **1-866-623-6868** if you have any questions or feedback about this patient reference guide.

A more detailed version of this quality standard, written for health care professionals, is available on our website. You can find it at [hqontario.ca](http://hqontario.ca).

## About Health Quality Ontario

Health Quality Ontario is the provincial advisor on the quality of health care. We are motivated by a single-minded purpose: **Better health for all Ontarians.**

Our quality standards are concise sets of statements outlining what quality care looks like. They focus on conditions where there are large variations in how care is delivered, or where there are gaps between the care provided in Ontario and the care patients should receive. They are based on the best available evidence and are developed in collaboration with clinical experts from across the province and patients and caregivers with lived experience with the condition being discussed.

For more information about Health Quality Ontario and our quality standards, visit: [hqontario.ca](http://hqontario.ca).