

Sores That Will Not Heal

Introduction

Some sores have trouble healing on their own. Sores that will not heal are a common problem.

Open sores that will not heal are also known as wounds or skin ulcers. There are many different kinds of sores. Some sores are more likely than others to have problems healing.

Some of the most common sores that have trouble healing on their own are:

- Venous Ulcers
- Arterial Ulcers
- Diabetic Ulcers, and
- Pressure Ulcers



If not treated on time and properly these sores could get worse. This could cause an infection to spread to nearby bones and possibly the rest of the body. This could lead to the need to amputate all or part of a limb and could be life threatening. Amputate a limb means to remove it surgically from the body. Examples of limbs are the arms and legs.

This reference summary discusses venous, arterial, diabetic and pressure ulcers as well as their causes, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment options and how to take care of your sores at home.

Venous Ulcers

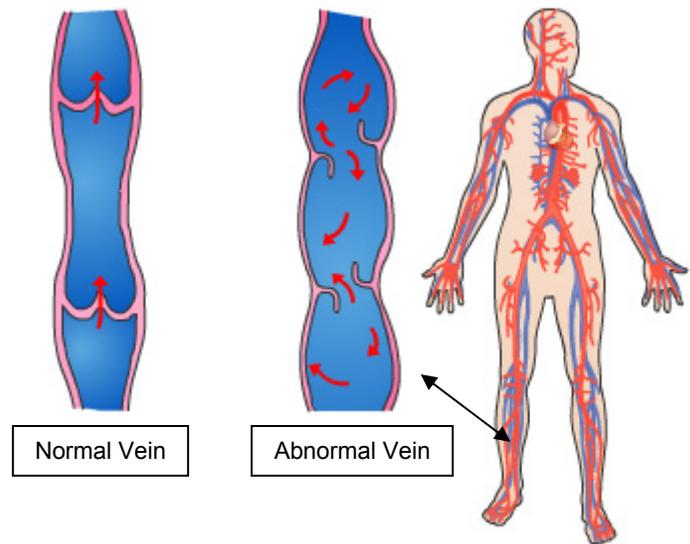
Venous ulcers are a common type of sore. They also can be called venous stasis ulcers, venous leg ulcers, or leg ulcers.

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Venous ulcers usually happen below the knee and above the ankle. Most of the time venous ulcers happen on the inner part of the leg.

Venous ulcers happen when the veins in the legs are not working well. Veins in the leg move blood from the legs and feet back to the heart.

When the veins in the leg are not working well, blood may pool in the lower legs. This can cause pressure that makes it hard for oxygen and nutrients to get to tissues. The body and its tissues need oxygen and nutrients to live.



When a part of the body does not get the oxygen and nutrients it needs because the veins are not working well, it can lead to a venous ulcer.

The bottom of a venous ulcer is colored red. Sometimes a venous ulcer may have a yellow or white colored film over it.

Venous ulcers may not be very painful unless they are infected. Infected venous ulcers may ooze a yellow or green colored drainage. Sometimes the area around the sore may swell and be a different color than normal.

Most people with a venous ulcer have swelling in one or both legs.

Risk factors that make a person more likely to develop a slow healing venous ulcer include:

- Varicose veins
- High blood pressure
- Standing or sitting for long periods of time
- Not being active
- Obesity
- A history of blood clots in the legs
- Being age 60 or older

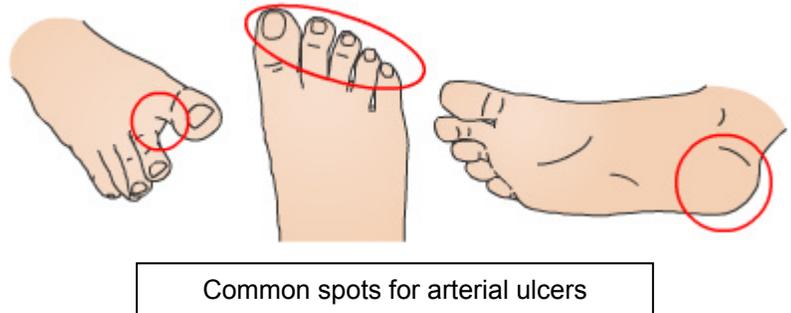


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Arterial Ulcers

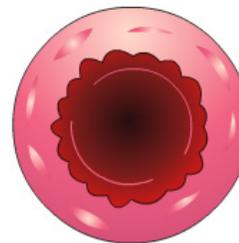
An arterial ulcer is another common type of sore.

Arterial ulcers usually happen on the feet. Common spots for arterial ulcers are between the toes, the tips of the toes, the heels and any other spot on the foot where rubbing happens.

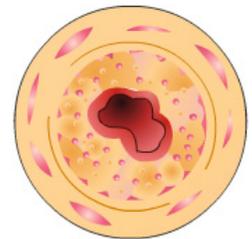


Arterial ulcers happen when blood is not moving well through the feet. This usually happens because of a condition called arteriosclerosis. Arteriosclerosis happens when the arteries become narrow because of fatty substances sticking to artery walls. It causes less blood to move through the arteries.

When the arteries in the feet are very narrow, it makes it hard for oxygen and nutrients to get to tissues. When narrow arteries block oxygen and nutrients from getting to an injured area, it can lead to arterial ulcers.



Normal Artery



Narrow Artery

Arterial ulcers can be very painful. They usually look as if they are sunken beneath the skin. The area around the ulcer may have a yellow, brown, black or grey color. This color shows that the blood is not moving well.

Risk factors that make a person more likely to develop arterial ulcers include:

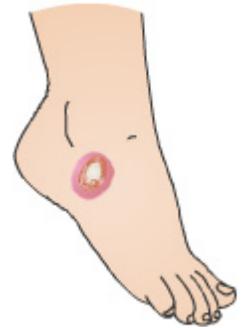
- High blood pressure
- Kidney problems
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Poor circulation



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Diabetic Ulcers

Over 17 million Americans have been diagnosed with diabetes. The effects of diabetes can slow wound healing anywhere on the body. This can lead to a common type of sore called a diabetic ulcer.



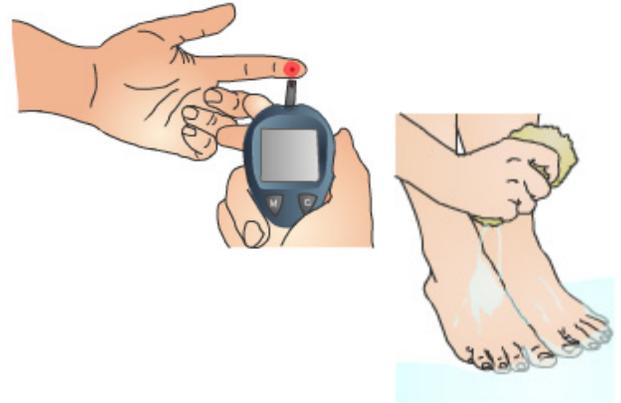
Diabetic ulcers usually happen on the feet.

Diabetes can damage nerves and cause them to not work well. This can make it so that a person has a hard time feeling pressure, injury or changes in temperature.

Diabetes can also cause damage to the blood vessels of the body. This can make it hard for oxygen and nutrients to get to tissue. Diabetic foot ulcers can result from small cracks and cuts on the foot that go unnoticed because of nerve damage.

Risk factors that make a person more likely to develop diabetic foot ulcers include:

- Damage to the nerves of the foot
- Poor circulation
- Poor foot hygiene
- Shoes that fit do not fit properly



Pressure Ulcers

Pressure ulcers are a common type of sore. They can develop quickly.

Pressure ulcers happen when an area of skin dies due to prolonged pressure. Pressure ulcers are often called “bed sores”.

For example, if a person sits or lies for a long time in one position, the pressure on the skin could cut off the oxygen to the skin. If the pressure is not stopped, the area of skin starts to die.



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Pressure ulcers can also happen when the skin is dragged over a surface. Make sure to lift yourself completely when moving. If you can't move yourself, ask your caregiver to use something to help with this, like a bed sheet.

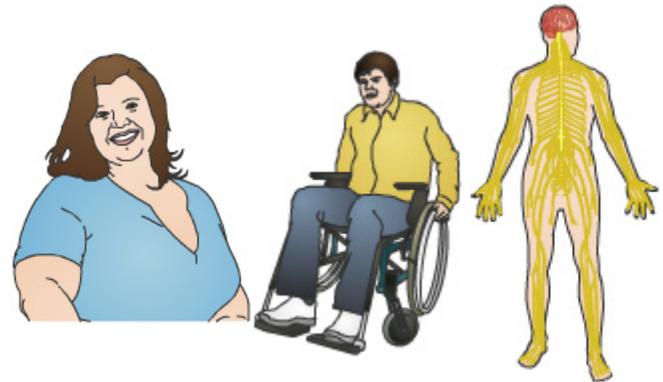


Pressure ulcers are most likely to happen on areas where your skin and bone are close such as:

- Elbows
- Back
- Ankles
- Hips
- Heels
- And any other area of skin under pressure for a long time

Risk factors that make a person more likely to develop pressure ulcers include:

- Obesity
- Being bedridden or living with paralysis
- Poor circulation
- Damage to nerves
- Loss of bladder or bowel control



Diagnosis and Treatment

If you have a sore that isn't healing well, you need to call your doctor. If left untreated, it could get worse or become infected. Untreated infected sores could lead to loss of a limb and can even be life threatening.

Treatment for slow healing sores depends a lot on what kind of sore it is and its condition. Treatment is most effective when tailored to your specific sore.

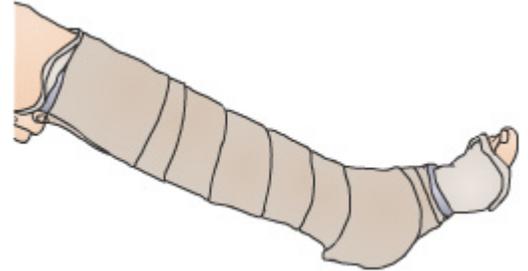
Your healthcare provider will examine the sore. He or she may take a swab or sample of it to check for infection. Your doctor may also do tests such as blood tests, MRI scans, CT scans and X-rays to help diagnose your sore and create a treatment plan.



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In general, treatment options for skin ulcers include cleaning the wound regularly, debridement, and treating any infections with antibiotics. Debridement is removing dead tissue.

Venous ulcers are often also treated with special bandages called compression wraps. Exercising and elevating your leg while resting may also help venous ulcers heal. Your doctor may prescribe one of many different types of wound dressings depending on your condition.



Both diabetic ulcers and pressure ulcers may be treated by removing pressure from the affected areas. If you have a diabetic foot ulcer, you may be given special shoes to wear.

Some procedures aim at restoring blood flow to areas of the body or cleaning the wounds thoroughly. If you have an arterial ulcer, your doctor may suggest surgery to improve the blood flow to the area. Your doctor may suggest other special treatments that are specific to your case.

Self Care

Follow your doctor's instructions for taking care of your sores.

Make sure to keep your sores clean. Wash your hands before and after working with your sore.



Make sure to eat a healthy diet. You need a balanced diet rich in vitamins and proteins to help your sores heal. Drink lots of fluids. Take all prescribed medicines.

If you have pressure ulcers, make sure to shift your weight and change positions often. If you cannot do this on your own, have a friend, family member, or caregiver help you.



If you have diabetic ulcers, make sure to check your feet daily for new problems.

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Conclusion

Some sores have trouble healing on their own. Sores that will not heal are a common problem. There are a lot of different kinds of sores that may have trouble healing on their own. Venous ulcers, arterial ulcers, diabetic ulcers, and pressure ulcers are all common types of slow healing sores.

If you have a sore that is not healing, you need to call your healthcare provider. If you don't, it could get infected and get worse. It could lead to a partial amputation, amputation of a limb, or even death.

Your healthcare provider can help diagnose the sore. He or she can also come up with a treatment plan.

Make sure to keep your sores clean. Wash your hands before and after working with your sore. Always follow your doctor's directions.

Most wounds heal more quickly with fewer complications if treated by a healthcare provider. Do not hesitate to get treatment if you have a sore that is not healing.



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