

Lesson one: Diabetic foot wounds and wound healing

A foot wound is a breaking of the skin anywhere on the foot.

An infected foot wound is serious as it can lead to amputation and even death.

Amputation can often be avoided by preventing foot wounds or by early identification and treatment of wounds when they do occur.

People with the following health conditions have an increased risk of foot wounds:

- Loss of feeling (sensation) in the feet
- Reduced blood flow
- Unusual foot shape
- Toe or foot amputation.

High pressure is one of the leading causes of foot wounds.

Pressure can occur when the foot touches any surface. If there is pressure on a wound, it will not heal. For a wound to heal, you must take away or 'offload' the pressure.

When a wound develops, the body will start a wound healing process to repair the skin.

There are seven principles for managing for wounds. All seven must be addressed for a wound to heal properly. A team approach to health care is necessary to achieve the seven principles of wound healing.

Lesson two: Offloading diabetic foot wounds

Offloading means reducing or removing pressure. Offloading is used to take pressure off a foot wound so that it can heal. Offloading is used for:

- **Wound protection:** Offloading protects areas at risk of wounds by reducing pressure in these areas
- **Wound management:** Offloading removes pressure from the wound so it can heal.
- **Protecting healed wounds:** After a wound has healed the skin and tissue are weaker and there is a high risk that it will occur again. Offloading can reduce pressure on this area so the wound does not come back.

The TAP Offloading module covers simple offloading products that can be readily provided in the community by personnel with some training and the minimum of resources:

Product	Description	Image
Rigid removable boot	Rigid removable boots hold the ankle, foot and toes still when walking. This reduces pressure on the foot and leg when walking and assists wounds to heal.	
Total contact cast	The total contact cast is designed and made for each person (custom made). It is the most effective method of offloading wounds on the bottom of the foot that are related to nerve damage. This is because it is not removable.	

Short term offloading pads	Wool felt or EVA padding is used as a short-term offloading option. Padding helps to move pressure away from the wound to other parts of the foot. The padding is stuck on to the person's shoe to offload the wound. There are several offloading pad designs.	
Toe prop	A toe prop is a pad that sits under the toes. It can be used when there is a wound on the end of the toe. The toe prop stops the end of the toe touching the ground when walking. This takes pressure off the wound.	

Some offloading products must be provided by services where there are personnel with more specialised training and resources. These products are not included in TAP. Examples are: Orthotics, Charcot Restrain Orthotic Walkers (CROW) and offloading shoes.

Lesson three: Step one: Select

Use the TAP referral for offloading diabetic foot wound(s), TAP assessment for offloading and TAP offloading selection table to find out if a person who has a foot wound may benefit from:

- Offloading products
- Other types of assistive products
- Referral to other services.

The TAP referral for offloading diabetic foot wound(s) form will be completed by a healthcare worker. This will outline information you will need about the person's health, lifestyle, environment and wound. The referral form will include an offloading prescription for an offloading product.

The TAP offloading assessment form is used to check the prescribed offloading product is the most suitable for the person and if they would benefit from other types of assistive products or referral to other services.

The TAP offloading selection table will support you to check which offloading product is safe, effective and most suitable for a person to use based on their assessment.

Lesson four: Step four: Fit

Correct fit of an offloading product is important to:

- Help the wound heal
- Make sure it is safe and easy to use
- Prevent further problems from happening

To check the fit of an offloading product, you should do it while the person is standing. As this will be a more accurate assessment to compare to when the person is walking.

For all offloading methods it is important that only a thin dressing is on the wound.

Lesson five: Step three: Use

Offloading will only work when offloading products are correctly used. Teaching the person how to use their offloading products and answering their questions is important.

Offloading products must not get wet. If they become wet, they will be damaged and may cause injury or wound worsening.

Lesson six: Step four: Follow up

Make follow up appointments on the same day that the person is seen by the referrer to have the dressing changed. The frequency of follow up should be:

- Follow up for offloading is weekly
- Follow up for offloading and an assistive product is weekly
- Follow up for wound care is as directed by the referrer.

Follow up more often if:

- There are any concerns to address
- The person requests an early follow up due to a problem
- The wound is deep
- The person has a history of poor wound healing.

Sometimes a wound may become worse between follow up appointments. If a wound is worse, or there is no progress with healing, always discuss with the person's wound care health professional and reconsider treatment options.