

LOWER EXTREMITY WOUNDS: INITIAL ASSESSMENT

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Evaluation of the patient presenting with a problem wound should start with identifying the wound etiology *before treatment*, if possible. The first component is to identify what is causing the wound and the patient's inability to heal the wound. The process for evaluation should include the following:

A *thorough* physical examination and medical history of the patient is very important.

- General health status and past history
- Presence of any other disease process
- Focused physical examination
- Lab studies (blood and vascular)
- Identify wound severity

Identification of any co-morbid factors that may preclude the patient to lower extremity wounds and stabilize or correct these factors. Assessment of the patient's knowledge base of the co-morbidity is a very important component of this part of the evaluation.

Categorize the wound on the basis of etiology and begin to come up with a plan for treatment or further evaluation, which may be done by you or may require a referral.



Possible types of wounds and some common symptoms that may be seen:

Ischemic/Arterial Ulcer

Claudication, history of rest pain, decreased pulses, temperature and skin changes, wound usually painful

Venous Ulcer

Varicose veins, chronic edema, venous surgery or removal, DVT history, history of trauma to area, wound usually painful

Neuropathic Ulcer

Abnormal sensory exam, diabetic history, deformity (Charcot foot), history of trauma to area, abnormal callous formation, wound is often not painful

Small Vessel/Vasculitis

Current history of systemic inflammatory disease (i.e. Crohn's colitis, malignancy, arthritis), wound is usually very painful, unusual appearance of ulcer

Infected Wound

Erythematous appearance of wound, purulent drainage, hypertrophic flesh, symptoms of sepsis, bone exposure

The goals of treatment for non-healing wounds:

- Establish the cause(s) of the wound
- Resolve the underlying cause(s) of the wound, if possible
- Have the patient receive the appropriate wound care in order to achieve healing in a reasonable time period
- Preserve function of the patient
- Educate the patient and the caregivers about how to prevent further wounds