

# ACTION UPDATE Update 3: Foot Health

Fold 3

## Groundswell's Action Updates

Groundswell's Peer Advocates support homeless people to attend over 1,400 health appointments a year. Each month our **Action Updates** highlight a topic which homeless people have told us is important and offer practical advice around the issue. The guidance and quotes are based on what our Peer Advocates see first hand when working with homeless people to improve health.

Fold 1

- Help to make health appointments
  - Go with you to your health appointments
  - Pay for your travel fares if needed.
- Find out more at: [www.groundswell.org.uk](http://www.groundswell.org.uk)  
Call our office on: 03000 039 600.  
Email us at: [info@groundswell.org.uk](mailto:info@groundswell.org.uk)



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Fold 2

## Key 'steps' to keep your feet healthy

It can be really hard to look after your feet whether you are sleeping out or you're in accommodation—here are some key steps to take to keep your feet healthy:

- Try to keep your feet warm & dry - change socks daily .
- Wash your feet every day and dry them carefully. If you can't get to a bathroom then use wet wipes.
- Get air to your feet as often as possible. Wear breathable shoes and try not to sleep in them.
- Day Centres sometimes have fresh shoes—just ask!
- Wet wipes and other products will be cheaper in a supermarket than a pharmacy.



A foot Ulcer—  
these can easily become infected if not treated

## Foot Health — Groundswell's Experience

Our Peer Advocates take three people a month to see the podiatrist — but they know that many more people we work with have foot health issues that are going untreated. Here's what our Peer Advocates say:

*"It's hard if people have a habit to feed, they need to be on their feet. But you can work out a way, like taking a chair to sit on when you do the big issue. Look at what's realistic—wash your feet and change your socks."*

*"It's all about preventative health care. If you leave it you could end up losing your feet. It's better to take a bit of time off in the short term than screw yourself in the long term."*

*"The thing is with treating fungal infections you have to do it every day. Change your socks and dressing every day."*

*"It's not expensive—a pack of socks, some wet wipes . It can make all the difference."*

## Groundswell

Groundswell exists to enable homeless and vulnerable people to take more control of their lives, have a greater influence on services and to play a full role in our community.

## Homeless Health Peer Advocacy

Groundswell works to improve the health of homeless people. Peer Advocates, who have been homeless themselves, can go with you to physical health appointments to help you to get the best service from the NHS. Practically we can offer you:

# ACTION UPDATE!

## Update 3: Foot Health

There are loads of things that can go wrong with your feet and it's much harder to deal with it when your on the streets or on your feet a lot. Remember **PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE!** Here's some info on the most common problems:

**BUNIONS:** These are deformities of your toes. They are caused by poorly fitting shoes and walking lots. They can be painful and result in cracked red skin and toes overlapping.

**PREVENTION:** Wear shoes that fit well, soft padding around the injury, use an ice pad to cool them. If they get very bad you may need surgery to correct them.



**CHIBLAINS:** These are when blood vessels swell up and can be linked to smoking. You can get them in your toes, fingers, ears and nose. They normally feel like an itchy burn and can get worse when you come into the warm. They can also be red and cause blisters.

**PREVENTION:** Try to keep hands and feet warm but don't heat them up fast if you have been cold. Stopping smoking will help—get advice here: <http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree>



**FROSTBITE:** This is when a part of your body actually freezes, most often toes or fingers. It starts with a feeling like pins and needles and if you don't get out of the cold then effected areas go hard and finally the skin goes white, blue or blotchy. If frostbite gets this bad you need urgent medical help—call an ambulance and get to A&E - they should admit you and treat your problem.

**PREVENTION:** It sounds obvious but try to keep your feet warm and dry. Don't rub affected areas or try to heat them directly as it will cause more damage. You need to slowly warm the area up—a warm (not hot) bath is best but it will hurt so—the best advice if this happens in hospital is going to be a lot better.



**FOOT ULCERS:** These are open wounds caused by poor blood supply to your feet. Watch out particularly if you have diabetes or inject drugs. Ulcers don't heal themselves so you need to get treatment - in the worst cases people have to have amputations.

**PREVENTION:** Exercise, safer injecting practices and stopping smoking will all help to reduce the risk of foot ulcers. If you have diabetes the risk of ulcers is much higher. If you do get an ulcer you really need to get some medical help.



**TRENCH FOOT:** You get this when your feet have been wet for a long time. Your feet can go numb, turn grey, swell up and wrinkle. Skin tissue begins to die off and can result in gangrene which could result in losing a foot.

**PREVENTION:** Try to keep your feet dry—change socks as often as possible.



**RAM'S HORN NAIL:** When toe nails get thick and curl around.

**PREVENTION:** Keep toe nails well cut. If you get this a podiatrist (specialist in foot health) needs to cut your nails for you. See a GP for a referral.



**PITTED KERATOLYSIS:** Caused by sweaty feet, this is an infection that makes the soles of your feet go white with pit marks. It's very smelly.

**PREVENTION:** Get air to your feet and change your shoes regularly. Anti-biotics can be prescribed to get rid of it. These can be prescribed by a GP. See our last Update on access to GPs here: <http://groundswell.org.uk/insightandaction/>



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