

# Electrical Stimulation and Electromagnetic Therapy for Wounds

Policy Number: DME 029.22  
Effective Date: April 1, 2023

[Instructions for Use](#)

Table of Contents	Page
<a href="#">Coverage Rationale</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Documentation Requirements</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Definitions</a> .....	2
<a href="#">Applicable Codes</a> .....	2
<a href="#">Description of Services</a> .....	2
<a href="#">Clinical Evidence</a> .....	3
<a href="#">U.S. Food and Drug Administration</a> .....	8
<a href="#">References</a> .....	8
<a href="#">Policy History/Revision Information</a> .....	10
<a href="#">Instructions for Use</a> .....	10

**Related Policy**

- [Electrical Stimulation for the Treatment of Pain and Muscle Rehabilitation](#)

## Coverage Rationale

Electrical stimulation is proven and medically necessary for treating [Stage III or IV](#) pressure ulcers that have failed to demonstrate [Measurable Signs of Healing](#) with 30 days of conventional treatment which includes all of the following:

- Application of dressings to maintain a moist wound environment; and
- Appropriate turning and positioning; and
- Debridement of necrotic tissue, if present; and
- Evaluation of and provision for adequate nutritional status; and
- Moisture and incontinence management; and
- Use of a pressure-reducing support surface.

The following are unproven and not medically necessary due to insufficient evidence of efficacy:

- Electrical stimulation for treating all other wounds or ulcers, including but not limited to:
  - Diabetic ulcers
  - Venous stasis ulcers
- Electromagnetic therapy for treating wounds or ulcers, including but not limited to:
  - Arterial ulcers
  - Chronic pressure ulcers
  - Diabetic foot ulcers
  - Soft tissue injuries
  - Venous stasis ulcers

## Documentation Requirements

Benefit coverage for health services is determined by the member specific benefit plan document and applicable laws that may require coverage for a specific service. The documentation requirements outlined below are used to assess whether the member meets the clinical criteria for coverage but do not guarantee coverage of the service requested.

HCPCS Codes*	Required Clinical Information
<b>Electrical Stimulation and Electromagnetic Therapy for Wounds</b>	
E0769 G0281	Medical notes documenting the following, when applicable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current prescription from physician</li> <li>• Diagnosis</li> <li>• Wound stage and size</li> <li>• Prior treatment duration and response</li> <li>• Plan of treatment</li> </ul>

\*For code descriptions, refer to the [Applicable Codes](#) section.

## Definitions

**Measurable Signs of Healing:** Wound is diminishing in size (either surface or depth) and there is decreased amount of exudate and necrotic tissue. (Gould et al., 2016)

**Pressure Ulcer Staging (National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel Staging System):**

- *Stage III:* Characterized by full-thickness loss of skin, in which fat is visible in the ulcer and granulation tissue and epibole (rolled wound edges) are often present. Slough and/or eschar may be visible. The depth of tissue damage varies by anatomical location. Undermining and tunneling may occur. Fascia, muscle, tendon, ligament, cartilage and/or bone are not exposed.
- *Stage IV:* Characterized by full-thickness skin and tissue loss with exposed or directly palpable fascia, muscle, tendon, ligament, cartilage or bone in the ulcer. Slough and/or eschar may be visible. Epibole (rolled edges), undermining and/or tunneling often occur. Depth varies by anatomical location.

## Applicable Codes

The following list(s) of procedure and/or diagnosis codes is provided for reference purposes only and may not be all inclusive. Listing of a code in this policy does not imply that the service described by the code is a covered or non-covered health service. Benefit coverage for health services is determined by the member specific benefit plan document and applicable laws that may require coverage for a specific service. The inclusion of a code does not imply any right to reimbursement or guarantee claim payment. Other Policies may apply.

HCPCS Code	Description
E0769	Electrical stimulation or electromagnetic wound Treatment device, not otherwise classified
G0281	Electrical stimulation, (unattended), to one or more areas, for chronic Stage III and Stage IV pressure ulcers, arterial ulcers, diabetic ulcers, and venous stasis ulcers not demonstrating measurable signs of healing after 30 days of conventional care, as part of a therapy plan of care
G0282	Electrical stimulation, (unattended), to one or more areas, for wound care other than described in G0281
G0295	Electromagnetic therapy, to one or more areas, for wound care other than described in G0329 or for other uses
G0329	Electromagnetic therapy, to one or more areas for chronic Stage III and Stage IV pressure ulcers, arterial ulcers, diabetic ulcers and venous stasis ulcers not demonstrating measurable signs of healing after 30 days of conventional care as part of a therapy plan of care

## Description of Services

Electrical stimulation involves the application of electrical current through electrodes placed on the skin near the wound and to the saline-moistened gauze placed over the wound. The saline provides a conductive medium that allows electric current to pass directly through the wound. The intent of electrical stimulation is to facilitate the healing of chronic wounds by promoting angiogenesis, collagen synthesis, proliferation of fibroblasts, and migration of epithelial cells. Chronic wounds are defined as wounds that do not heal completely after 30 days. (Lazarus et al., 1994)

Electromagnetic therapy refers to the application of electromagnetic fields to the wound area, rather than direct application of electrical current. This procedure is also referred to as pulsed electromagnetic induction (PEMI), pulsed electromagnetic field (PEMF), and pulsed electromagnetic therapy.

## Clinical Evidence

### Electrical Stimulation

#### *Pressure Ulcers*

Results from randomized controlled trials (RCTs) provide support for the use of electrical stimulation to increase the healing rate of stage III or IV pressure ulcers.

Chen et al. (2022) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis in an attempt to update the evidence and assessing the efficiency and safety of electrical stimulation (ES) for pressure ulcer (PU) healing, applying no restriction in care setting, parameters, duration (both ulcers and intervention duration) or types of patients. Seventeen randomized controlled trials including 740 patients were included in this study. Meta-analysis of eight randomized controlled trials demonstrated that electrical stimulation significantly reduced the ulcer surface in contrast with standard wound care alone or pulsed sham electrical stimulation. Nine studies showed that electrical stimulation increased the risk of pressure ulcers being completely healed than the controlled group. Three studies reported that adverse reactions were rare. The meta-analysis results indicated that ES was identified to have statistically significant effect on the overall percentage of wound surface area (WSA) reduction ( $p = 0.001$ ), reduction in ulcer size ( $p = 0.02$ ) and the number of healed PUs ( $p = 0.04$ ). Taken together with descriptive results from this systematic review, ES results in PUs' improvement by healing, reduces the absolute WSA and the percentage of ulcer healing rate. The results were different in polarities of current, health settings of patients, current types, age of patients and duration of PUs, future studies should focus on these areas (Polak 2018, 2017, 2016a and 2016b, which were previously cited in this policy, are included in this review).

Arora et al. (2020) completed a Cochrane review comparing electrical stimulation plus standard care to sham/no electrical stimulation plus standard care for the management of pressure ulcers. The review included 20 RCTs with a total of 913 patients (mean age range: 26 to 83 years) with pressure ulcers ranging from a mean of 4 days to > 12 months. Nineteen studies were conducted in four different settings, including rehabilitation and geriatric hospitals, medical centers, a residential care center, and a community-based center. ES probably increases the proportion of pressure ulcers healed compared with no ES (risk ratio (RR) 1.99, 95% confidence interval (CI) 1.39 to 2.85;  $I^2 = 0\%$ ; 11 studies, 501 participants (512 pressure ulcers)). Most of the pressure ulcers were on the sacral and coccygeal region (30%), and most were stage III (45%). Half the studies were at risk of performance and detection bias and 25% were at risk of attrition and selective reporting bias. In conclusion the author indicated that electrical stimulation (ES) probably increases the proportion of pressure ulcers healed, but its effect on time to complete healing is uncertain, and the certainty of evidence for all outcomes is moderate, low or very low. The evidence to date is insufficient to support the widespread use of ES for all pressure ulcers, additional research is needed to determine the effect of electrical stimulation in all significant scenarios. (Lala 2016 and Polak 2018 included in this study).

Girgis and Duarte (2018) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis to determine and quantify the efficacy of high-voltage monophasic pulsed current (HVMP) in the treatment of stage II-IV pressure ulcers. Nine RCTs and two case series matched the criteria and were included in the systematic review, whereas only level 1 evidence RCTs were included in the meta-analysis. The percentage of wound surface area reduction per week was 12.39% (95% CI) for HVMP plus standard wound care (SWC) and 6.96% (95% CI) for SWC alone or SWC plus sham HVMP. The net effect of HVMP was 5.4% per week (an increase of 78% greater than SWC alone or SWC plus sham HVMP). The authors concluded that level 1, 2 and 4 evidence studies consistently indicate that HVMP plus SWC are more effective than SWC alone or SWC plus sham HVMP in treating stage II-IV pressure ulcers. According to the authors, level 1 evidence studies show that HVMP intervention improves the healing of pressure ulcers (reduced wound surface area), and combined with SWC, increases the probability of complete healing and almost eliminates the probability of worsening of healing. HVMP intervention was shown to be relatively safe, with rare adverse reactions. While patients with stage II pressure ulcers were included in some of the studies in this meta-analysis, the authors did not perform a sub-group analysis specific to stage II pressure ulcers. Therefore, it is unclear if this procedure is effective in for this indication or if the aggregate findings are driven by the effect among patients with stage III and IV pressure ulcers. Polak et al. (2017), Polak et al. (2016a), and Polak et al. (2016b), which were previously cited in this policy, are included in the Girgis and Duarte (2018) systematic review and meta-analysis.

A randomized, controlled, double-blind clinical study conducted by Polak et al. (2018) not included in the above systematic review/meta-analysis, evaluated the effects of cathodal and HVMP electrical stimulation (ES) on pressure ulcers (PUs) of at least 4 weeks' duration. Persons older than 18 years of age, hospitalized with neurological injuries, at high risk for PU development, and with at least one Stage 2 to Stage 4 PU were eligible to participate in the study. Patients were randomly assigned to 1 of 3 groups: anodal (AG), cathodal (CG), or placebo (PG) ES. All groups received individualized PU prevention and standard wound care. In the PG, sham ES was applied; the AG and CG were treated with anodal and cathodal HVMP, 50 minutes per day, 5 days per week, for a maximum of 8 weeks. Nonlinear approximation based on exponential function was used to calculate treatment time needed to reduce the wound area by 50%. Of the 61 participating patients, 20 were in the AG, 21 in the CG, and 20 in the PG. PUs (baseline size range 1.01 cm<sup>2</sup> to 59.57 cm<sup>2</sup>; duration 4 to 48 weeks) were most frequently located in the sacral region (73.77%) and classified as Stage 3 (62.29%). Periwound skin blood flow (PSBF) at week 2 was significantly higher in the AG and CG than in the PG. Week 4 differences were not statistically significant. Wound percentage area reduction calculated at week 8 for the AG and CG were significantly different from PG ulcers. In both ES groups, periwound skin blood flow (PSBF) at week 4 and percent wound surface area reductions between weeks 4 and 8 were positively correlated, but only the AG correlation was statistically significant. The authors concluded that both ES modalities improved blood flow and wound area reduction rate.

Khouri et al. (2017) conducted an effect size meta-analysis to assess the overall efficacy of electrical stimulation (ES) on wound healing, to compare the efficacy of the different modalities of electrical stimulation, and to determine whether efficacy differs depending on the wound etiology, size, and age of the chronic wound. Twenty-nine randomized clinical trials with 1,510 patients and 1,753 ulcers were included in the review. Overall efficacy of ES on wound healing was a 0.72 SMD corresponding to a moderate to large effect size. The reviewers found that unidirectional high voltage pulsed current (HVPC) with the active electrode over the wound was the best evidence-based protocol to improve wound healing with a 0.8 SMD, while evaluation of the efficacy of direct current was limited by the small number of studies. ES was more effective on pressure ulcers compared to venous and diabetic ulcers, and efficacy trended to be inversely associated with the wound size and duration. According to the reviewers, this analysis confirms the overall efficacy of ES to enhance healing of chronic wounds and highlights the superiority of HVPC over other type of currents, which is more effective on pressure ulcers, and inversely associated with the wound size and duration.

In a systematic review, Ashrafi et al. (2017) provided a detailed update on the variety of electrical stimulation modalities used in the management of lower extremity wounds. Forty-three studies were included in the review. According to the reviewers, pulsed current appears superior to other electrical modalities available. The majority of studies support the beneficial effects of pulsed current over conservative management of lower extremity cutaneous wounds. Although it appears to have no benefit over causal surgical intervention, it is a treatment option which could be utilized in those patients unsuitable for surgery. The reviewers stated that there is a lack of high-quality studies available to judge confidently the effect of pulsed current on arterial and pressure wounds, and further robust trials are necessary to identify the optimal pulsed current waveform. Other waveforms and modalities appear promising; however, they still lack large trial data to recommend a firm conclusion with regards to their use. Current studies also vary in quantity, quality and protocol across the different modalities. According to the reviewers, the ideal electrical stimulation device needs to be non-invasive, portable and cost-effective and provides minimal interference with patients' daily life. The reviewers stated that further studies are necessary to establish the ideal electrical stimulation modality, parameters, method of delivery and duration of treatment.

Liu et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review to critically appraise and synthesize updated evidence on the impact of electrical stimulation (ES) versus standard wound care (comprising cleansing, dressing, nutrition, and debridement as necessary) and/or sham stimulation on pressure ulcers (PrU) healing rates in persons with spinal cord injuries (SCIs). Included studies were limited to peer-reviewed, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and non-RCTs (CCTs) published in English from 1985 to 2014. A total of 8 trials were reviewed - 6 RCTs and 2 CCTs included a total of 517 SCI participants who had at least 1 PrU. The number of patients per study ranged from 7 to 150 and the number of wounds from 7 to 192. Comparison models included ES irrespective of current type and placement of electrodes against sham/no ES (7 trials), ES delivered by electrodes overlaid on the ulcer versus sham/no ES (4 trials), ES delivered by electrodes placed on intact skin around the ulcer versus sham/no ES (4 trials), ES delivered by electrodes overlaid on the wound bed versus placed on intact skin around the ulcer (1 trial), ES with pulsed current versus sham/no ES (6 trials), ES with constant current versus sham/no ES (2 trials), pulsed current ES versus constant current ES (1 trial), number of PrUs closed (2 trials), and incidence of PrU worsened by ES versus sham/no ES (2 trials). The overall quality of studies was moderate; 2 trials were rated as good quality, 2 were poor quality, and 4 were moderate. Evidence showed ES increased the rate of PrU healing in patients with SCI (n = 7 studies and 559 ulcers), and a higher proportion of ulcers healed (n = 2 studies and 226 ulcers). The data suggest pulsed current ES increased the healing

rate (n = 6 studies and 509 ulcers) more than constant current (n = 2 studies and 200 ulcers). In addition, wounds with electrodes overlaying the wound bed seemed to heal the ulcer faster than wounds with electrodes placed on intact skin around the ulcer. The authors indicated that the small number of relevant trials, together with substantial heterogeneity in this review, made it difficult to interpret some findings and draw firm conclusions. Higher heterogeneities evident across the trials in this review can be explained by the variation of study design and stimulation parameters (stimulation frequency, intensity, waveform) and stimulation device used.

Lala et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on the effects of electrical stimulation therapy (EST) on healing pressure ulcers in individuals with spinal cord injury (SCI). Studies were included if EST was used to treat pressure ulcers in individuals with SCI. A total of 15 studies met the inclusion criteria. A meta-analysis with five studies demonstrated that EST significantly decreased the ulcer size by 1.32%/day compared to standard wound care (SWC) or sham EST. Another meta-analysis conducted with four studies showed that EST increased the risk of wound healing by 1.55 times compared with standard wound care or sham EST. Because of the wide array of outcome measures across studies, a single meta-analysis could not be conducted. According to the authors, EST appears to be an effective adjunctive therapy to accelerate and increase pressure ulcer closure in individuals with SCI.

A clinical practice guideline for the prevention and treatment of pressure ulcers developed by the National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel (NPUAP), European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel (EPUAP) and Pan Pacific Pressure Injury Alliance (PPPIA) recommends that pulsed current electrical stimulation be administered to facilitate wound healing in recalcitrant category/stage II pressure injuries and category/stage III or IV pressure injuries (strength of evidence = A). The NPUAP guideline includes statements about implementation of an individualized continence management plan and prompt cleansing following incontinence episodes. (European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel, National Pressure Injury Advisory Panel and Pan Pacific Pressure Injury Alliance, 2019)

### ***Diabetic Foot Ulcers and/or Venous Stasis Ulcers***

There is limited evidence in the published scientific literature to support the use of electrical stimulation to facilitate healing of all other wounds or ulcers such as diabetic ulcers and venous stasis ulcers. The data from clinical trials for these types of ulcers are insufficient to prove efficacy or to evaluate the effects of this therapy compared with other treatment options.

Melotto et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review with the main purpose to collect, present and critically evaluate the current findings available in the literature regarding the effects of electrical stimulation (ES) on diabetic foot ulcers (DFUs) compared with the standard wound care (SWC) alone. Electrical stimulation (ES) is a physical-based therapy able to increase cells activity and migration into wound bed as well as inhibiting bacterial activity. Seven articles out of 560 publications met the inclusion criteria. Due to the heterogeneity of the studies a meta-analysis was not performed, the study designs made the comparison of results difficult. Findings showed that healing rate (HR) appears to be higher among diabetic ulcers treated with ES; however, the reliability of these findings is affected by the small sample sizes of the studies. Also, four studies are considered as moderate or high risk of bias. The evidence to suggest the standard use of ES in the treatment of DFUs remains insufficient. Larger more robust studies are needed to confirm these findings.

Zheng et al. (2022) in a systematic review and meta-analysis, authors aimed to systematically review the literature to better understand the efficacy of electrical stimulation (ES) for the treatment of patients with diabetes-related ulcers. Embase, Medline, and Cochrane Library databases were searched through July 31, 2021. Original trials for ES treatment of patients with diabetes-related ulcers with placebo or standard care as the control group were included. 20 articles were selected for full-text review with 10 included in the data quality assessment and data analysis. The main outcomes were ulcer area reduction and healing rates. Meta-analyses were performed to compare the standardized mean difference (SMD) in the percentage of ulcer reduction and risk ratio of non-healing rates between ES treatment and placebo or standard care. Authors used the Revised Cochrane risk-of-bias tool for randomized trials to assess the risk of bias for each included article. Funnel plots and Egger's test were used to assess publication bias. Compared to placebo or standard care, ES had a significant benefit for the treatment of patients with diabetes-related ulcers in terms of percentage of ulcer reduction (SMD = 2.56, 95% CI: 1.43-3.69; p < 0.001 (Q-test), I<sup>2</sup> = 93.9%) and ulcer healing rates [risk ratio of non-healing rates for the ES group was 0.72 (95% CI: 0.54-0.96; p = 0.38 (Q-test), I<sup>2</sup> = 2.3%)]. Limitations included the following: while ES appeared safe for treating ulcers related to diabetes, there was not sufficient data to evaluate the adverse effects of ES; a meta-regression analysis to explore possible potentiators of ES effects due to the limited data; insufficient data to perform subgroup analysis according to different ulcer types; although all included studies were RCTs, only two studies were categorized as having a low risk of bias. The main limitations focus on lack of

protocol information to clarify, no selection reporting, no information on the generation of randomization, and some concerns in blinding or masking. Thus, the low quality of the evidence could potentially decrease the impact of the current findings. In conclusion, ES could be used to treat patients with diabetes-related ulcers. ES treatment was effective for ulcer area reduction and ulcer healing, although it had a high heterogeneity level among the included studies. Pulsed current ES has the potential benefit of increasing ulcer healing compared to direct current ES. Additional large-scale robust studies are needed to explain the adverse events and potentiators of ES in the treatment of patients with diabetes-related ulcers.

Chen et al. (2020) performed a meta-analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of electric stimulation (ES) for diabetic foot ulcer (DFU) treatment. The authors searched MEDLINE, EMBASE, Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, and ClinicalTrials.gov databases for randomized clinical trials published through March 2019 that compared the efficacy of ES and standard wound care (SWC) versus SWC alone for DFU treatment. The outcomes were pooled using a random-effects model. Of the 145 randomized clinical trials initially identified, seven studies (with a total of 274 patients) met the inclusion criteria. The percentage decrease in ulcer area at 4 weeks was significantly greater in patients treated with ES and SWC than SWC alone (standardized mean difference, 1.09; 95% confidence interval, 0.62-1.57;  $p < .001$ ). The ulcer healing rate at 12 weeks was also significantly faster in the ES group (risk difference, 0.19; 95% confidence interval, 0.06-0.32;  $p = .005$ ). Subgroup analysis showed comparable efficacies with different waveforms (monophasic vs biphasic). One study limitation was lack of relevant data, a subgroup analysis of the efficacy of ES for different DFU subtypes (such as different ulcer sites) could not be conducted. This meta-analysis indicates that ES may accelerate DFU healing and may be an effective adjunctive therapy for these complex wounds. More RCTs with larger sample sizes are needed to expansively evaluate the value of ES for DFUs.

Avazzadeh et al. (2020) in a comparative study looked at the hemodynamic performance of two neuromuscular electrical stimulation devices applied to the lower limb. Neuromuscular muscular electrical stimulation can produce adequate increases in lower limb hemodynamics enough to prevent venous stasis. The aim of this study was to measure the hemodynamic changes in the lower limb with the use of two neuromuscular electrical stimulation devices. Twelve healthy volunteers received two neuromuscular stimulation device interventions. The Geko™ and National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway neuromuscular electrical stimulation devices were randomized between dominant and non-dominant legs. Hemodynamic measurements of peak venous velocity (cm/s), the time average mean velocity (TAMEAN) (cm/s), and ejected volume (mL) of blood were recorded. Peak venous velocity was significantly increased by the Geko™ and the NUI Galway device compared to baseline blood flow ( $p < 0.0001$ ), while only the voluntary contraction produced significant increases in TAMEAN and ejected volume (both  $p < 0.05$ ). Both devices tested in this study require further examination to determine their effectiveness at altering hemodynamics to beneficial levels in terms of VLU therapy. This study is limited by the number of participants and the fact that the study was carried out on young health adults. VLUs are more frequently seen in elderly and non-ambulatory patients, as the reduced mobility seen in these groups contributes to underactivation of the calf muscle pump, which can lead to chronic venous insufficiency (CVI). A larger study with age-appropriate controls is required with these devices to determine their effectiveness on limb hemodynamics.

The International Working Group of the Diabetic Foot (IWGDF) published a 2016 update to the 2012 systematic review on the management of diabetic foot ulcers. Selected studies fell into several categories which included electrical therapy. Heterogeneity of studies prevented pooled analysis of results. The authors reported similar conclusions as the earlier review indicating that there is little published evidence to justify the use of electrical therapy for managing diabetic foot ulcers. The authors also noted that analysis of the evidence continues to present difficulties in this field as controlled studies remain few, and the majority continue to be of poor methodological quality. (Game et al., 2016a)

An IWGDF guidance on use of interventions to enhance the healing of chronic diabetic ulcers of the foot, recommends the following: do not select agents reported to have an impact on wound healing through alteration of the physical environment, including through the use of electricity, in preference to accepted standards of good quality care (GRADE: strength of recommendation: strong; quality of evidence: low). The IWGDF guidance indicated that studies on the use of electrical stimulation have reported no convincing evidence of benefit for diabetic foot ulcers. (Game et al., 2016b)

In the *Diabetic Foot Problems: Prevention and Management* clinical guideline, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommended that electrical stimulation therapy should not be offered as an adjunctive treatment for diabetic foot problems unless part of a clinical trial. (NICE, 2015; Last updated October 2019)

In a clinical practice guideline from the Society for Vascular Surgery and the American Venous Forum for the management of venous leg ulcers, electrical stimulation for venous leg ulcers is not recommended. This is due to few studies that focus solely

on venous leg ulcers along with inconsistency in the treatment parameters including variability in type of electrical current, settings, treatment times, and preferred waveforms, making comparisons impossible. (O'Donnell et al. 2014)

## Electromagnetic Therapy

There is limited evidence in the published scientific literature to support the use of electromagnetic therapy for treating chronic wounds and ulcers. The data from clinical trials are insufficient to prove efficacy or to evaluate the effects of this therapy compared with other treatment options.

The International Working Group of the Diabetic Foot (IWGDF) published a 2016 update to the 2012 systematic review on the management of diabetic foot ulcers. Selected studies fell into several categories which included electromagnetic therapy. Heterogeneity of studies prevented pooled analysis of results. The authors reported similar conclusions as the earlier review indicating that there is little published evidence to justify the use of electromagnetic therapy for managing diabetic foot ulcers. The authors also noted that analysis of the evidence continues to present difficulties in this field as controlled studies remain few, and the majority continue to be of poor methodological quality. (Game et al., 2016)

In a Cochrane review, Aziz et al. (2011) assessed the effects of electromagnetic therapy (EMT) on the healing of venous leg ulcers. Three randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of variable quality involving 94 people were included in the review. All the trials compared the use of EMT with sham-EMT. In the two trials that reported healing rates; one small trial (44 participants) reported that significantly more ulcers healed in the EMT group than the sham-EMT group however this result was not robust to different assumptions about the outcomes of participants who were lost to follow-up. The second trial that reported numbers of ulcers healed found no significant difference in healing. The third trial was also small (31 participants) and reported significantly greater reductions in ulcer size in the EMT group however this result may have been influenced by differences in the prognostic profiles of the treatment groups. The authors concluded that there is no high-quality evidence that electromagnetic therapy increases the rate of healing of venous leg ulcers, and further research is needed. A 2013 update and 2015 update did not identify any new trials that would change the earlier conclusions. (Aziz et al., 2013, Aziz and Cullum, 2015)

In another Cochrane review, Aziz et al. (2010) assessed the effects of EMT on the healing of pressure ulcers. Two randomized controlled trials (RCTs), involving 60 participants, at unclear risk of bias were included in the review. Both trials compared the use of EMT with sham EMT, although one of the trials included a third arm in which only standard therapy was applied. Neither study found a statistically significant difference in complete healing in people treated with EMT compared with those in the control group. According to the authors, the results provide no strong evidence of benefit in using EMT to treat pressure ulcers. However, the possibility of a beneficial or harmful effect cannot be ruled out because there were only two included trials, both with methodological limitations and small numbers of participants. The authors state that further research is recommended. A 2012 update and 2015 update did not identify any new trials that would change the earlier conclusions. (Aziz et al., 2012; Aziz and Bell-Syer, 2015)

Smith et al. (2013) summarized the evidence comparing the effectiveness and safety of treatment strategies for adults with pressure ulcers. Four randomized trials and comparative observational studies (n = 112) evaluating electromagnetic therapy were included in the review. The authors found that electromagnetic therapy was no different from sham treatment or standard care in wound-healing outcomes.

In a randomized, double-blinded study, Czyz et al. (2012) investigated the benefits of electromagnetic energy in eyelid wound healing in 57 patients who underwent upper blepharoplasty. There was no difference in patient pain rating when comparing placebo with the electromagnetic energy patch. Patients reported 6% less edema ( $p = .11$ ) and 10% less ecchymosis ( $p = .17$ ) with the active patch eye than in control eye. The authors concluded that the use of pulsed electromagnetic energy did not have an effect on postoperative pain, edema, or ecchymosis as rated by patients and physicians.

## Clinical Practice Guidelines

### *American College of Physicians (ACP)*

The ACP developed a guideline to present the evidence and provide clinical recommendations based on the comparative effectiveness of treatments of pressure ulcers. The guideline was based on published literature on this topic. The guideline graded the quality of evidence and strength of recommendations by using ACP's clinical practice guidelines grading system. Based on the evidence, the ACP recommends that clinicians use electrical stimulation as adjunctive therapy in patients with pressure ulcers to accelerate wound healing (Grade: weak recommendation, moderate-quality evidence). According to the

ACP, moderate-quality evidence supports the use of electrical stimulation in addition to standard treatment because it has been shown to accelerate the healing rate of stage 2 to 4 ulcers. Low-quality evidence showed no difference or mixed findings for the other adjunctive therapies assessed, including electromagnetic therapy. Standard or conventional treatment of pressure ulcers includes support surfaces, repositioning, nutritional support, protection of the wound from contamination, and promotion of tissue healing by using debridement and wound cleansing. (Qaseem et al., 2015)

## U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

This section is to be used for informational purposes only. FDA approval alone is not a basis for coverage.

The FDA has not approved any electrical stimulation or electromagnetic devices specifically for the treatment of chronic wounds. Use of these devices for wound healing is an off-label indication.

The FDA regulates electrical stimulation devices as Class II devices, and more than 500 of these devices have been cleared by the FDA 510(k) process. To locate marketing clearance information for a specific device or manufacturer, search the following Center for Devices and Radiological Health (CDRH) 510(k) database or the Premarket Approval (PMA) database by product and/or manufacturer name:

- <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfPMN/pmn.cfm>
- <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfPMA/pma.cfm>

(Accessed October 17, 2022)

### Electromagnetic Therapy Devices

The Diapulse<sup>®</sup> device is classified by the FDA as "diathermy, shortwave, for use other than applying therapeutic deep heat" and received a device class 3 license in 1987. In 1991, the FDA notified the Diapulse Corporation that their device may only be marketed as adjunctive therapy in the palliative treatment of postoperative edema and pain in superficial soft tissue. It has not been approved by the FDA for the treatment of chronic wounds. This means the manufacturer may not market the device for wound healing although this does not prohibit physicians and other healthcare providers from providing this therapy for unapproved uses. The SofPulse<sup>™</sup> device is also classified under "diathermy, shortwave, for use other than applying therapeutic deep heat" and received a device class 3 license in 1996.

The Provant<sup>®</sup> Wound Closure System utilizes the Regenesys Model 42, classified by the FDA as a short-wave diathermy device. It received 510(k) clearance in October 1997 for use in the palliative treatment of postoperative pain and edema in superficial soft tissue. According to the FDA, this device applies electromagnetic energy to the body and is substantially equivalent to the SofPulse device.

## References

The foregoing Oxford policy has been adapted from an existing UnitedHealthcare national policy that was researched, developed and approved by UnitedHealthcare Medical Technology Assessment Committee. [2023T05270]

Ashrafi M, Alonso-Rasgado T, Baguneid M, et al. The efficacy of electrical stimulation in lower extremity cutaneous wound healing: A systematic review. *Exp Dermatol*. 2017 Feb;26(2):171-178.

Arora M, Harvey LA, Glinsky JV, et al. Electrical stimulation for treating pressure ulcers. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2020 Jan 22;1(1):CD012196.

Avazzadeh S, O'Farrell A, Flaherty K, O'Connell S, ÓLaighin G, et al. Comparison of the hemodynamic performance of two neuromuscular electrical stimulation devices applied to the lower limb. *J Pers Med*. 2020 May 7;10(2):36.

Aziz Z, Bell-Syer SEM. Electromagnetic therapy for treating pressure ulcers. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2015, Issue 9. Art. No.: CD002930. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD002930.pub6.

Aziz Z, Cullum N, Flemming K. Electromagnetic therapy for treating venous leg ulcers. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2013 Feb 28;2:CD002933.

Aziz Z, Cullum N. Electromagnetic therapy for treating venous leg ulcers. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. Jul 2 2015; 7:CD002933.



Aziz Z, Cullum NA, Flemming K. Electromagnetic therapy for treating venous leg ulcers. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2011 Mar 16;(3):CD002933.

Aziz Z, Flemming K, Cullum NA, Olyaei Manesh A. Electromagnetic therapy for treating pressure ulcers. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2010 Nov 10;(11):CD002930.

Aziz Z, Flemming K. Electromagnetic therapy for treating pressure ulcers. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2012 Dec 12;12:CD002930.

Chen Z, Chen ZY, Liu WH, Li GS. Electric stimulation as an effective adjunctive therapy for diabetic foot ulcer: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Adv Skin Wound Care.* 2020 Nov;33(11):608-612.

Chen L, Ruan Y, Ma Y, Ge L, Han L. Effectiveness and safety of electrical stimulation for treating pressure ulcers: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Int J Nurs Pract.* 2022 Mar 3:e13041.

Czyz CN, Foster JA, Lam VB, et al. Efficacy of pulsed electromagnetic energy in postoperative recovery from blepharoplasty. *Dermatol Surg.* 2012 Mar;38(3):445-50. doi: 10.1111/j.1524-4725.2011.02215.x.

ECRI Institute. Hotline Response. Standard-of-care practices for managing diabetic foot ulcers. January 2020.

ECRI Institute. Hotline Response. Standard-of-care practices for managing pressure ulcers. February 2020.

European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel, National Pressure Injury Advisory Panel and Pan Pacific Pressure Injury Alliance. Prevention and Treatment of Pressure Ulcers/Injuries: Clinical Practice Guideline. The International Guideline.

Emily Haesler (Ed.). EPUAP/NPIAP/PPPIA; 2019. Quick Reference Guide available at: <http://www.internationalguideline.com/guideline>. Accessed October 17, 2022.

Game FL, Apelqvist J, Attinger C, et al.; International Working Group on the Diabetic Foot. Effectiveness of interventions to enhance healing of chronic ulcers of the foot in diabetes: a systematic review. *Diabetes Metab Res Rev.* 2016 Jan;32 Suppl 1:154-68.

Game FL, Attinger C, Hartemann A, et al.; International Working Group on the Diabetic Foot. IWGDF guidance on use of interventions to enhance the healing of chronic ulcers of the foot in diabetes. *Diabetes Metab Res Rev.* 2016b Jan;32 Suppl 1:75-83.

Girgis B, Duarte JA. High voltage monophasic pulsed current (HVMP) for stage II-IV pressure ulcer healing. A systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Tissue Viability.* 2018 Nov;27(4):274-284.

Gould L, Stuntz M, Giovannelli M, et al. Wound Healing Society 2015 update on guidelines for pressure ulcers. *Wound Repair Regen.* 2016 Jan-Feb;24(1):145-62.

Khouri C, Kotzki S, Roustit M, et al. Hierarchical evaluation of electrical stimulation protocols for chronic wound healing: An effect size meta-analysis. *Wound Repair Regen.* 2017 Sep;25(5):883-891.

Lazarus GS, Cooper DM, Knighton DR, et al. Definitions and guidelines for assessment of wounds and evaluation of healing. *Arch Dermatol* 1994 Apr;130(4):489-93.

Lala D, Spaulding SJ, Burke SM, et al. Electrical stimulation therapy for the treatment of pressure ulcers in individuals with spinal cord injury: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Int Wound J.* 2016 Dec;13(6):1214-1226.

Liu L, Moody J, Gall A. A quantitative, pooled analysis and systematic review of controlled trials on the impact of electrical stimulation settings and placement on pressure ulcer healing rates in persons with spinal cord injuries. *Ostomy Wound Manage.* 2016 Jul;62(7):16-34. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). NG19 Diabetic foot problems: prevention and management. August 2015; Last updated January 2016.

Melotto G, Tunprasert T, Forss JR. The effects of electrical stimulation on diabetic ulcers of foot and lower limb: A systematic review. *Int Wound J.* 2022 Feb 2.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). NG19. Diabetic foot problems: prevention and management. August 2015; Last updated October 2019.

National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel (NPUAP). Pressure injury stages. 2016. Available at: <https://npuap.org/page/PressureInjuryStages>. Accessed October 17, 2022.

O'Donnell TF Jr, Passman MA, Marston WA, et al. Society for Vascular Surgery; American Venous Forum. Management of venous leg ulcers: clinical practice guidelines of the Society for Vascular Surgery® and the American Venous Forum. *J Vasc Surg.* 2014 Aug;60(2 Suppl):3S-59S.

Polak A, Kloth LC, Blaszczyk E, et al. Evaluation of the healing progress of pressure ulcers treated with cathodal high-voltage monophasic pulsed current: results of a prospective, double-blind, randomized clinical trial. *Adv Skin Wound Care*. 2016 Oct;29(10):447-59.

Polak A, Kloth LC, Blaszczyk E, et al. The efficacy of pressure ulcer treatment with cathodal and cathodal-anodal high-voltage monophasic pulsed current: a prospective, randomized, controlled clinical trial. *Phys Ther*. 2017 Aug 1;97(8):777-789.

Polak A, Kucio C, Kloth LC, et al. A randomized, controlled clinical study to assess the effect of anodal and cathodal electrical stimulation on periwound skin blood flow and pressure ulcer size reduction in persons with neurological injuries. *Ostomy Wound Manage*. 2018 Feb;64(2):10-29.

Polak A, Taradaj J, Nawrat-Szoltysik A, et al. Reduction of pressure ulcer size with high-voltage pulsed current and high-frequency ultrasound: a randomised trial. *J Wound Care*. 2016b Dec 2;25(12):742-754.

Qaseem A, Humphrey LL, Forciea MA, et al. Clinical Guidelines Committee of the American College of Physicians. Treatment of pressure ulcers: a clinical practice guideline from the American College of Physicians. *Ann Intern Med*. 2015 Mar 3;162(5):370-9.

Smith ME, Totten A, Hickam DH, et al. Pressure ulcer treatment strategies: a systematic comparative effectiveness review. *Ann Intern Med*. 2013 Jul 2;159(1):39-50.

Zheng Y, Du X, Yin L, Liu H. Effect of electrical stimulation on patients with diabetes-related ulcers: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Endocr Disord*. 2022 Apr 27;22(1):112.

## Policy History/Revision Information

Date	Summary of Changes
04/01/2023	<b>Supporting Information</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Updated <i>Clinical Evidence</i> and <i>References</i> sections to reflect the most current information</li><li>Archived previous policy version DME 029.21</li></ul>

## Instructions for Use

This Clinical Policy provides assistance in interpreting UnitedHealthcare Oxford standard benefit plans. When deciding coverage, the member specific benefit plan document must be referenced as the terms of the member specific benefit plan may differ from the standard plan. In the event of a conflict, the member specific benefit plan document governs. Before using this policy, please check the member specific benefit plan document and any applicable federal or state mandates. UnitedHealthcare Oxford reserves the right to modify its Policies as necessary. This Clinical Policy is provided for informational purposes. It does not constitute medical advice.

The term Oxford includes Oxford Health Plans, LLC and all of its subsidiaries as appropriate for these policies. Unless otherwise stated, Oxford policies do not apply to Medicare Advantage members.

UnitedHealthcare may also use tools developed by third parties, such as the InterQual® criteria, to assist us in administering health benefits. UnitedHealthcare Oxford Clinical Policies are intended to be used in connection with the independent professional medical judgment of a qualified health care provider and do not constitute the practice of medicine or medical advice.