

Diabetes Foot Care – Self-Management



When you have diabetes, proper foot care is very important. Poor foot care may lead to amputation of a foot or leg.

As a person with diabetes, you are more vulnerable to foot problems, because diabetes can damage your nerves and reduce blood flow to your feet. The American Diabetes Association estimates that one in five people with diabetes who seek hospital care do so for foot problems. By taking proper care of your feet, most serious health problems associated with diabetes can be prevented. Your doctor will check your feet each year for any problems.

Here are some diabetes foot care tips to follow.

Wash and Dry Your Feet Daily

- Use mild soaps
- Use warm water
- Pat your skin dry; do not rub. Thoroughly dry your feet.
- After washing, use lotion on your feet to prevent cracking. Do not put lotion between your toes.

Examine Your Feet Each Day

- Check the tops and bottoms of your feet. Have someone else look at your feet if you cannot see them.
- Check for dry, cracked skin.
- Look for blisters, cuts, scratches, or other sores.
- Check for redness, increased warmth, or tenderness when touching any area of your feet.
- Check for ingrown toenails, corns, and calluses.
- If you get a blister or sore from your shoes, do not "pop" it. Apply a bandage and wear a different pair of shoes.

Take Care of Your Toenails

- Cut toenails after bathing, when they are soft.
- Cut toenails straight across and smooth with a nail file.
- Avoid cutting into the corners of toes.
- Do not cut cuticles.
- You may want a podiatrist (foot doctor) to cut your toenails.

Be Careful When Exercising

- Walk and exercise in comfortable shoes.
- Do not exercise when you have open sores on your feet.

Protect Your Feet With Shoes and Socks

- Never go barefoot. Always protect your feet by wearing shoes or hard-soled slippers or footwear.
- Avoid shoes with high heels and pointed toes.
- Avoid shoes that expose your toes or heels (such as open-toed shoes or sandals). These types of shoes increase your risk for injury and potential infections.
- Try on new footwear with the type of socks you usually wear.
- Do not wear new shoes for more than an hour at a time.
- Change your socks daily.
- Look and feel inside your shoes before putting them on to make sure there are no foreign objects or rough areas.
- Avoid tight socks.
- Wear natural-fiber socks (cotton, wool, or a cotton-wool blend).
- Wear special shoes if your health care provider recommends them.
- Wear shoes/boots that will protect your feet from various weather conditions (cold, moisture, etc.).
- Make sure your shoes fit properly. If you have neuropathy (nerve damage), you may not notice that your shoes are too tight. Perform the "footwear test" described below.

Footwear Test

Use this simple test to see if your shoes fit correctly:

- Stand on a piece of paper. (Make sure you are standing and not sitting, because your foot changes shape when you stand.)
- Trace the outline of your foot.
- Trace the outline of your shoe.
- Compare the tracings: Is the shoe too narrow? Is your foot crammed into the shoe? The shoe should be at least 1/2 inch longer than your longest toe and as wide as your foot.

Proper Shoe Choices

The following types of shoes are best for people with diabetes:

- Closed toes and heels
- Leather uppers without a seam inside
- At least 1/2 inch extra space at the end of your longest toe

- Inside of shoe should be soft with no rough areas
- Outer sole should be made of stiff material
- Shoes should be at least as wide as your feet

Tips for Foot Care in Diabetes

- Don't wait to treat a minor foot problem if you have diabetes. Follow your health care provider's guidelines and first aid guidelines.
- Report foot injuries and infections to your health care provider immediately.
- Check water temperature with your elbow, not your foot.
- Do not use a heating pad on your feet.
- Do not cross your legs.
- Do not self-treat your corns, calluses, or other foot problems. Go to your health care provider or podiatrist to treat these conditions.

When to Talk to Your Doctor About Foot Care

Your health care provider should examine your feet at each visit. In addition, see your health care provider if you have any of the following problems with your feet:

- Athlete's foot (cracking between the toes)
- Sores or wounds on your feet
- Ingrown toenails
- Increasing numbness or pain
- Calluses
- Redness
- Blackening of skin
- Bunions
- Infection
- Hammer toes (when the middle joint of toes is permanently bent downward)