

## **Diabetes and Foot Care**

**Foot problems are very common in people with diabetes and can lead to serious complications.**

This section provides basic information about how diabetes affects your feet and what you can do to keep your feet healthy.

### **Diabetes & your feet**

Diabetes can cause nerve damage (also known as diabetes peripheral neuropathy - DPN) and poor blood flow or circulation to the legs and feet (also known as peripheral arterial disease - PAD). As a result, people with diabetes are less likely to feel a foot injury, such as a blister or cut. Diabetes can make these injuries more difficult to heal. Unnoticed and untreated, even small foot injuries can quickly become infected, potentially leading to serious complications.

### **Daily foot care**

As always, prevention is the best medicine. A good daily foot care routine will help keep your feet healthy.

Start by assembling a foot care kit containing nail clippers, nail file, lotion, and a non-breakable hand mirror. Having everything you need in one place makes it easier to follow this foot care routine every day:

1. Wash your feet in warm (not hot) water, using a mild soap. Don't soak your feet, as this can dry your skin.
2. Dry your feet carefully, especially between your toes.
3. Thoroughly check your feet and between your toes to make sure there are no cuts, cracks, ingrown toenails, blisters, etc. Use a hand mirror to see the bottom of your feet, or ask someone else to check them for you.
4. Clean cuts or scratches with mild soap and water, and cover with a dry dressing suitable for sensitive skin.
5. Trim your toenails straight across and file any sharp edges. Don't cut the nails too short.
6. Apply a good lotion to your heels and soles. Wipe off excess lotion that is not absorbed. Don't put lotion between your toes, as the excessive moisture can promote infection.
7. Wear fresh clean socks and well-fitting shoes every day. Whenever possible, wear white socks . if you have a cut or sore, the drainage will be easy to see.

### **Best advice**

**Do:**

- Wear well-fitting shoes. They should be supportive, have low heels (less than five centimetres high) and should not rub or pinch. Shop at a reputable store with knowledgeable staff who can professionally fit your shoes.
- Buy shoes in the late afternoon (since your feet swell slightly by then).
- Wear socks at night if your feet get cold.

- Elevate your feet when you are sitting.
- Wiggle your toes and move your ankles around for a few minutes several times a day to improve blood flow in your feet and legs.
- Exercise regularly to improve circulation.
- Inspect your feet daily and in particular, feel for skin temperature differences between your feet.

#### Don't:

- Use over-the-counter medications to treat corns and warts. They are dangerous for people with diabetes.
- Wear anything tight around your legs, such as tight socks or knee-highs.
- Ever go barefoot, even indoors. Consider buying a pair of well-fitting shoes that are just for indoors.
- Put hot water bottles or heating pads on your feet.
- Sit or cross your legs for long periods of time.
- Smoke. Smoking decreases circulation and healing, and significantly increases the risks of amputation.
- Wear over-the-counter insoles - they can cause blisters if they are not right for your feet.

## Your health-care team

Make the most out of your visit with your health-care professional by asking these three questions:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Members of your foot care team can include:

- **Chiropodists or Podiatrists:** Specialize in treating foot diseases, disorders and dysfunctions
- **Diabetes Educators:** Provide education on diabetes, including foot care
- **Doctors:** Assist in diabetes management, and some have specialized training in foot care
- **Nurses:** Some have specialized training in foot care
- **Orthotists/Prosthetists:** Specialize in orthotic and prosthetic devices

## Signs of a Foot Problem

Prevention is the best medicine. Being able to identify signs of foot problems can go a long way in preventing complications.

Have your health care professional check your feet AT LEAST one to two times per year or more if required.

## When to see your doctor

If you have any corns (thick or hard skin on toes), calluses (thick skin on bottom of feet), in-grown toenails, warts or slivers, have them treated by your doctor or a foot care specialist (such as a podiatrist, chiroprapist or experienced foot care nurse). Do not try to treat them yourself.

If you have any swelling, warmth, redness or pain in your legs or feet, see your doctor or foot specialist right away.

Have your bare feet checked by your doctor at least once a year. In addition, ask your doctor to screen you for neuropathy and loss of circulation at least once a year.

Take your socks off at every diabetes-related visit to your doctor and ask him or her to inspect your feet.

## Know the signs

Know the signs	Are your feet...	What can you do?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Numb, painful or tingling?</li><li>• Do your feet feel like blocks of wood?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Control your blood glucose (sugar) levels.</li><li>• Have a health-care professional trim your toenails and care for the skin on your feet.</li><li>• Have your shoes professionally fitted.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Changing shape?</li><li>• Is one foot different than the other?</li><li>• Any change is important.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid too much walking.</li><li>• Visit your health-care professional as soon as possible.</li><li>• Have your shoes professionally fitted.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dry, callused or cracked?</li><li>• Do they have sores or blisters?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Changes to your skin should be seen by a health-care professional.</li><li>• Wash a sore or blister with warm water; dry well, and cover with a bandage. See a health-care professional today.</li><li>• Avoid walking on your foot as it heals.</li></ul>

Please continue to check your feet every day for any changes or signs of injury.

If you have answered YES to any of these questions, please see a health-care professional as soon as possible. Be sure to tell him/her that you have diabetes. Avoid using over-the-counter treatments unless directed to by a health-care professional.



*Content from:*

<http://www.diabetes.ca/diabetes-and-you/healthy-living-resources/foot-care/a-step-towards-good-health>

<http://www.diabetes.ca/diabetes-and-you/healthy-living-resources/foot-care/signs-of-foot-problems>