

Diabetes: Foot care

How does diabetes affect my body?

Diabetes causes your blood sugar levels to be higher than normal. Over time, high blood sugar levels can damage the blood vessels and nerves in your body.

Damage to your nerves means that you may have burning pain or lose feeling in a part of your body (this is called diabetic neuropathy). Damage to the blood vessels means that your feet may not be getting a good supply of blood.

Why do I have to worry more about my feet?

People with diabetes often have trouble with their feet. Part of the problem is that the loss of feeling in your feet makes it hard for you to tell if you have a blister or sore. If little sores aren't taken care of, they can get worse and turn into ulcers (serious, deep sores). If these ulcers become infected, you may have to go to the hospital or, in very serious cases, have a foot amputated (removed). This handout will give you some tips on how to care for your feet.

How can I avoid problems with my feet?

Keep your blood sugar level as close to normal as possible. Also, follow your doctor's advice on diet, exercise and medicine. Here are some other ways to protect your feet:

- Wash your feet every day with lukewarm (not hot) water and mild soap.
- Dry your feet well, especially between the toes. Use a soft towel and pat gently; don't rub.
- Keep the skin of your feet smooth by applying a cream or lanolin lotion, especially on the heels. If the skin is cracked, talk to your doctor about how to treat it.
- Keep your feet dry by dusting them with nonmedicated powder before putting on shoes, socks or stockings.
- Check your feet every day. You may need a mirror to look at the bottoms of your feet. Call your doctor at the very first sign of redness, swelling, pain that doesn't go away, or numbness or tingling in any part of your foot.
- Don't treat calluses, corns or bunions without talking to your doctor first.
- Cut toenails straight across to avoid ingrown toenails. It might help to soak your toenails in warm water to soften them before you cut them.
- Don't let your feet get too hot or too cold.
- Don't go barefoot.

What should I look for when choosing shoes and socks?

- Don't wear shoes without socks.
- Don't wear sandals or other open-toed shoes.
- Avoid high-heeled shoes and shoes with pointed toes.
- Wear well-padded socks or stockings that are 1/2 inch longer than your longest toe. Don't wear stretch socks, nylon socks, socks with an elastic band or garter at the top, or socks with inside seams.
- Don't wear uncomfortable or tight shoes that rub or cut into your feet. If you've had problems before because of shoes that didn't fit, you may want to be fitted for a custom-molded shoe.
- Talk to your doctor before you buy special shoes or inserts.
- Shop for new shoes at the end of the day when your feet are a little swollen. If shoes are comfortable when your feet are swollen, they'll probably be comfortable all day.
- Break in new shoes slowly by wearing them for no more than an hour a day for several days.
- Change socks and shoes every day. Have at least 2 pairs of shoes so you can switch pairs every other day.
- Look inside your shoes every day for things like gravel or torn linings. These things could rub against your feet and cause blisters or sores.

How often will my doctor check my feet?

Your doctor or nurse should check your feet periodically when you go in for a visit. If you are having any problems, such as loss of feeling, sores or ingrown toenails, tell your doctor right away.

How can I learn more?

For more information, talk to your family doctor. You can also learn more by calling the American Diabetes Association at 800-342-2383 or visiting their Web site at www.diabetes.org.

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This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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