

Foot Care



Diabetes and your feet

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

Diabetes affects the circulation and immune systems, which makes it harder for the body to heal itself. Over time, diabetes can damage sensory nerves (this is known as “neuropathy”), especially in the hands and feet. As a result, people with diabetes are less likely to feel a foot injury, such as a blister or cut. Unnoticed and untreated, even small foot injuries can quickly become infected, potentially leading to serious complications.

Shake out your shoes or wear them on your hands before you wear them on your feet, because you don't know what's in there.

Daily foot care

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

Start by putting together a foot care kit containing nail clippers, a nail file, lotion, a pumice stone 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. While your feet are still wet, use a pumice stone to keep calluses under control.
3. Dry your feet carefully, especially between your toes.
4. 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.
5. Clean cuts or scratches with mild soap and water, and cover with a dry dressing suitable for sensitive skin.
6. Trim your toenails straight across and file any sharp edges. Don't cut your nails too short.
7. Apply an unscented 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 may cause infection.
8. Wear fresh, clean socks and well-fitting shoes every day. Whenever possible, wear white socks – if you have a cut or sore, the blood or pus will be easy to see.

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When to see your family health care provider

- If you have any swelling, warmth, redness or pain in your legs or feet, see your family health care provider right away.
- If you have any corns (thick or hard skin on toes), calluses (thick skin on bottom of feet), ingrown toenails, warts or slivers, have them treated by your family health care provider or a foot care specialist (such as a podiatrist, chiropodist or experienced foot care nurse). Do not try to treat them yourself.
- Have your bare feet checked by your family health care provider at least once a year. In addition, ask your family health care provider 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 family health care provider and ask him or her to inspect your feet.



Diabetes foot care dos and don'ts

Do wear well-fitting shoes.

They should be supportive, have low heels (less than 5 cm high) and should not rub or pinch. Shop at a reputable store with knowledgeable staff who can professionally fit your shoes.

Do wear socks at night if your feet get cold.

Do elevate your feet when you are sitting.

Do 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.

Do exercise regularly to improve circulation.

Do inspect your feet daily and in particular, feel for skin temperature differences between your feet.

Don't wear high heels, pointed-toe shoes, sandals (open-toe or open-heel) or worn-out shoes.

Don't wear anything tight around your legs, such as tight socks or knee-highs.

Don't ever go barefoot, even indoors. Consider buying a pair of well-fitting shoes that are just for indoors.

Don't put hot water bottles or heating pads on your feet.

Don't cross your legs for long periods of time.

Don't smoke. Smoking decreases circulation and healing, and significantly increases the risks of amputation.

Don't have pedicures by non-health care professionals.

For more information on how to take care of your feet, watch the "Managing Your Feet" video in this kit.

This document reflects our
CPG
Clinical Practice Guidelines

Content taken from the Canadian Diabetes Association's consumer fact sheet, *Foot Care: A step toward good health* © 2008