

Diabetic Foot Care Facts

People with diabetes suffer from two serious causes of foot problems: nerve damage and poor blood flow from high blood glucose. These two combined together may cause problems that could result in amputation of a foot or leg if not treated.

Nerve Damage

Nerve damage, called Diabetic Neuropathy, can cause lack of feeling (pain, heat, cold) in the feet. This is dangerous because a diabetic may not feel a small cut or blister. The sore may get worse or infected because they are unaware that it is even there.

Poor Blood Flow

Poor blood flow is called Peripheral Vascular Disease (PVD). In a diabetic person the blood flow to legs and feet is reduced, making it harder for a sore to heal or for an infection to clear up. Diabetics who smoke have even more problems with PVD than non-smokers.

Foot Care

When a person has diabetes it is essential to have their feet checked by a health care provider at least once a year. (The feet should be checked more often if the person is experiencing foot problems.) A health care provider should be contacted if a diabetic notices cuts or breaks in the skin, ingrown nails, or noticeable changes in their feet. The health care provider should be the one to trim any corns or calluses.

Suggested Guidelines:

- Inspect feet every day for blisters, red spots, cuts, swelling, or nail problems. A wound can quickly worsen when accompanied by a diabetic's poor blood flow and nerve damage. A mirror is helpful for checking the bottoms of the feet if balance or flexibility is a problem. Make sure to check between the toes as well.
- Keep feet clean by washing them daily. Wash feet in lukewarm water and use a soft washcloth or sponge. Dry them carefully, taking care to dry between the toes (moisture left there could lead to a fungal infection). Use a lotion to keep skin from cracking.
- Protect feet from hot and cold temperatures. Because of the nerve damage caused by diabetes, burns and frostbite can occur before a person realizes it. Test bath water with the elbow to make sure the temperature is not too hot. Wear shoes outdoors to prevent direct contact between skin and hot summer surfaces. Apply sunscreen if feet are exposed to the sun. Be extra watchful for frostbite during the cold winter months.
- Keep feet warm and dry. Protect them from snow and rain. Wear warm socks and shoes in the winter and change socks if the material becomes wet.
- Never walk barefoot. Shoes and socks protect feet from cuts, scratches, and bumps.



Diabetic Foot Care Facts, cont.

Suggested Guidelines, cont.:

- Make sure shoes fit well. Shoes should be shaken out and inspected before being put on to make sure there is nothing inside that will rub or irritate. (The nerve damage caused by diabetes may cause a person to walk with a pebble inside their shoe and not feel it.)
 - Wear comfortable socks. Avoid pairs with tight elastic at the top because the tightness may reduce blood circulation. Don't wear thick or bulky socks that can rub or irritate the skin. A doctor may recommend diabetic socks with moisture-wicking fibers and an antimicrobial finish (this inhibits fungal and bacterial growth on the sock).
 - Trim toenails straight across so that the cut isn't so close to the toe itself. Filing the edges with an emery board or nail file will lessen the likelihood of inflicting a wound on oneself with a sharp toenail.
 - Make an effort to not inhibit the blood flow to the feet. Put feet up when sitting. Wiggle toes and move ankles up and down to stimulate blood flow. Don't cross legs for any period of time as this compresses the blood vessels at the knee.
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