

Foot Care for Diabetics



The Importance of Foot Care

Feet are one of the most vulnerable parts of the body, yet most people tend to neglect them. For the majority, this is not too serious, but for those with diabetes it can have dire consequences. The feet are a particular source of potential problems related to the complications of the disease process. Over time, increased blood sugar levels cause numerous problems to the blood vessels. Sugar-based substances line the walls of the small blood vessels and cause them to thicken and leak.

Fatty deposits clog the arteries (atherosclerosis), reducing circulation and causing hardening of the arteries as well.

It is this poor circulation to the legs that can cause many potential and severe problems. When the circulation to the legs is decreased, the foot is at greater risk for injury and infection.

People who have had diabetes for a long time often have damage to the nerve and blood supply to the feet. The symptoms of nerve damage include numbness, loss of feeling, tingling, and burning sensations or pain. Those of impaired blood supply include pain at rest, especially at night, pain in the calf area while walking, and feet that feel cold to the touch.

Every year, thousands of people have toes, feet, even legs amputated because of diabetes related foot problems. Most of these could have been prevented by people foot care. When you have diabetes, it makes sense to take extra care of your feet.



Personal Hygiene

Get into the habit of examining your feet daily for any change of temperature, any loss of feeling or sensation, tingling, burning, and pain. Also look for cuts, cracks, abrasions, corns, or hard skin, any of which can lead to infection. If any of these are present, bathe with a mild antiseptic, and see your chiropodist, doctor or hospital diabetic department without delay.

Wash your feet daily with mild soap and tepid water. **DO NOT SOAK THEM.** Never use Washing Soda or Epsom Salts in a footbath. Dry them carefully, especially between the toes, which is where germs such as Athletes Foot can easily breed. Use a soft towel and gentle blotting action to dry them. If your skin is dry, sparingly apply a

good quality, non-medicated moisturizing cream. If you use a talcum powder, choose a non-medicated one such as baby powder, or a specially formulated powder specifically for the feet. Apply it in the mornings and wash it off at night as it can encourage the growth of bacteria if left on too long. If the skin between the toes becomes moist, apply a little surgical spirit at night.



Tips for Caring for Your Feet

- Avoid cutting off circulation to the feet. Don't wear garters or constricting socks or hose.
- Keep your blood sugar under good control.
- Inspect your feet daily. Look for cuts, scrapes, calluses, swelling, blisters or open areas and red areas. If you can't get help to check your feet, use a mirror.
- Wash your feet daily, dry well between toes. Do not use lotion or oils between the toes.
- Avoid using heating pads, hot water bottles or electric blanket. You can burn your feet or other areas without knowing it. If your feet are cold, wear extra socks.
- Always test water temperature with your hand before putting your feet into it.
- Consult your physician before using any treatments of chemicals on warts, calluses, etc. Many over the counter products are too harsh for diabetics.
- Consider talking to your health care provider about special footwear if you have reddened areas or decreased sensation. Always check inside your shoes before wearing them, making sure there are no sharp objects, nails, pebbles, or that the shoe lining is not rough or torn.
- Don't walk barefoot.
- Don't smoke, this can impair the circulation, particularly in persons with diabetes. It can seriously worsen foot and leg problems.
- Choose socks without seams or lumps in them. Don't wear mended socks, pull your socks on gently and make sure they are not too tight. Padded athletic socks are good, and they protect the feet while walking.
- See your health care provider if any signs of problems occur. You should have your feet checked by your physician at least once a year.



Sources: Composed by Diabetes Educators from Myrtue Medical Center, Cass County Memorial Hospital and Montgomery County Memorial Hospital.