

FOOT CARE AND

D·I·A·B·E·T·E·S

Important Information From Your Doctor

Diabetes can contribute to foot problems in two ways:

- It can cause decreased feeling in the feet, so that injuries such as cuts and scrapes may go unnoticed.
- It can cause decreased circulation to the feet, resulting in a reduced blood supply that may be insufficient to fight infection and heal wounds. The risks of developing foot problems can be greatly reduced if you follow the simple principles of foot care outlined here and see your doctor regularly.

Take good care of your feet

Wash your feet everyday. Use warm water, not hot, and a mild soap. Don't put your feet in water without testing it first with your hand, elbow, or a thermometer. Don't soak your feet unless recommended by your physician.

Pat your feet dry with a soft towel, making sure to dry between the toes. Do not rub the skin too vigorously. If your skin is dry or shows evidence of cracking, use a moisturizing cream as prescribed and directed by your doctor. Never put the cream between your toes. Foot powder, used sparingly, can help if you have a problem with excessive perspiration. Change stockings daily. Don't wear stockings that have been mended or have seams; these can injure or irritate the skin.

Shoes

Shoes that fit poorly can cause irritation and injury. Shoes should fit snugly but not tightly. Make sure there is plenty of room for your toes. Avoid shoes made of plastics; leather shoes that allow your feet to "breathe" are best. New shoes should be broken in gradually. Inspect the inside of your shoes daily for torn linings or foreign objects. Remember, diabetics sometimes have decreased sensation and can be unaware of something inside the shoe. Walking or running shoes may be helpful for some diabetics. Consult your physician or podiatrist. If you have deformed feet, you may need special therapeutic shoes.

Never go barefoot. Always wear shoes or slippers, even at home, and especially in the dark. Remember: an unnoticed minor cut, scrape, or burn can rapidly lead to a serious infection in a person with diabetes.

Trim your toenails carefully

Be very careful to avoid injury when you trim your toenails. Trim them frequently, straight across, and not too short. Do not dig into the corners of the toenails. Use a nail clipper or an emery board or nail file. It helps if you soften your nails by soaking them in warm water for about 10 minutes before cutting them. If nails are thickened and difficult to cut, see your doctor.

No home surgery

Don't try to remove ingrown toenails. Don't use razor blades, scissors, or knives to remove calluses or corns. A minor cut can rapidly lead to serious infection. Removal of an ingrown toenail should be done by your physician or podiatrist. They can also give you instructions on the use of emery boards or pumice stones for removing calluses at home. Extremely thickened calluses should be removed by your physician or podiatrist.

Watch out for burns

People with diabetes may have a loss of feeling in their feet and suffer a burn without knowing it. It is important that you check the temperature of hot water before you put your feet in it. Bath water should be lukewarm, between 85° and 90° F. If you don't have a bath thermometer, test the water with your elbow.

Don't use hot water bottles or heating pads. Check with the doctor about the use of an electric blanket on your bed. Wear socks to keep your feet warm. Wear protective footwear at the beach or around swimming pools. Do not use chemical corn or callous removers; they can cause chemical burns.

Women should avoid tight pantyhose, panty girdles, elastic garters, and socks with elastic tops. If you see lines or indentations when you take off socks or undergarments, they are probably too tight and thus may cause swelling of the feet.

Don't smoke

If you smoke, stop! Smoking narrows the blood vessels and decreases circulation to the feet. Smoking is not wise for anyone, and particularly dangerous for people with diabetes.

