



Foot care for people with diabetes

Podiatry Service

How diabetes can affect your feet?

Neuropathy.

Neuropathy is the name given to damage to the nerves in the feet. It is a common complication with diabetes and once this damage has occurred it cannot be reversed. It can lead to dry skin, discomfort, pain and deformity. Loss of sensation makes the feet feel numb and cold. This makes them vulnerable to injury, often leading to a foot ulcer.

Poor blood supply.

Ischaemia is the name for a lack of oxygen to the skin. This occurs when arteries to the lower leg become narrow or blocked so blood cannot flow easily. This is known as peripheral vascular disease (PVD). If the circulation is poor any injury to the skin may struggle to heal. Gangrene occurs when the skin dies due to the blood flow being completely obstructed. Smoking, high blood pressure and high cholesterol make the circulation worse.

If your leg arteries are blocked it is often a sign that your heart and other arteries are at risk. Increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Infection.

Diabetes alters the body's ability to fight infection. This means that not only are the feet more prone to infection, but also it is more difficult to get rid of infections once they have established.

You should seek medical advice (from your GP, nurse or podiatrist) straight away if your feet show any signs of infection such as pain, swelling, redness, pus or heat.

Deformity.

Deformity in feet such as bunions or hammer toes can increase the risk of rubbing, blisters and pressure areas when in footwear. This can lead to corns and callus as well as ulcers.

Feet suffer much wear and tear in normal daily living. Even when sitting pressure against the ground or footwear can cause problems. In diabetes the above complications can make these problems worse.

Footwear

Shoes should be foot shaped. Ill fitting footwear can cause abrasions to the feet. It is therefore necessary to ensure that your footwear fits well, is long enough, wide enough and deep enough. Feet should be measured to get the correct size.

Remember if you have sensory loss you will not be able to feel if the shoe doesn't fit.

Shoes should have good fastening, e.g. lace-up or Velcro, to help minimise the movement of the foot within the shoe. Friction and shear stresses can cause blisters or over long periods calluses and corns. Excessive pressure over an area can cause the skin to breakdown and ulcerate.

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Try to wear hosiery with as small seam as possible or wear them inside out. Thick seams can damage fragile skin. Make sure they are soft top socks which don't restrict your circulation, and are not too tight at the tops around the toes. They should preferably be made of cotton (better for hot feet) or wool (better for cold feet) and change them on a daily basis. If you wear thick hosiery in the winter, ensure your footwear will accommodate them.

Before putting on your shoes check the sole and inside for loose objects and rough areas before wearing them. If you have lost sensation in your feet, do not walk around barefoot.

Hygiene

- Wash your feet every day.
- Do not soak your feet.
- Dry thoroughly, especially between the toes.

Nail Care

- Cut your nail to the shape of the toe, do not cut down the sides as this may cause an ingrown toenail.
- Do not cut them too short.
- Gently file the nails to remove any rough edges.

Your skin

- Use a moisturizing cream every day avoiding the area between your toes
- Check the skin for any cuts, blisters or cracks. Do not ignore minor injuries (see first aid below).
- DO NOT use medicated corn plasters, pull off hard skin or use anything sharp to remove corn or callus yourself.
- Corns and callus (hard skin) should be treated by a podiatrist.
- If you are unable to manage your own foot care consider private podiatry and chiropody. The Podiatry Department do not provide routine basic nail care.

Danger signs and first aid

- Check your feet every day for redness, swelling, colour change, broken skin, discharge, marked increase in temperature or pain.
- Cover any cuts, grazes or blisters with sterile dressing.
- Seek medical advice as soon as possible.

Remember...

Do not delay if you have a foot problem or are concerned about your foot health. If problems can be dealt with in their early stages it may prevent future deterioration. Help and advice can be obtained from your doctor, nurse or podiatrist.