

Foot Care for People with Diabetes

The feet are at risk for problems in people with diabetes. That is because 2 key risk factors come together. There is poor circulation of blood to the feet (called “peripheral vascular disease”). And, there is loss of feeling in the feet (from “peripheral neuropathy”). These lead to a high rate of foot problems for people with diabetes. And, an amputation can be a feared result. Today we know more about how to prevent it. There are also new wound care methods and equipment. So, you can steer clear of amputation in most cases.

In your routine exams, your doctor should test you for numbness. You can also check for numbness yourself. But, the progression of nerve disease is slow. That makes it difficult to detect. Cold feet can be a sign of poor circulation. Here is a more certain clue. Notice if you have pain in your legs when you walk or exercise. But, that pain stops as soon as you rest. If so, this is a special condition (called “intermittent claudication”). Exercise is a good treatment for poor circulation; it helps new blood vessels grow.

Your feet can get injured from:

- Something that breaks your skin (such as a cut)
- A penetrating wound (such as stepping on a tack)
- Walking barefoot on a hot surface
- Constant pressure in one spot (as from a tight shoe)
- Repeated stress or infection

If you are at risk, you need to be on guard. Here are tips that can help you avoid injuries. These tips can also help keep them from getting worse when they do occur.

- **Bathe your feet daily.** Wash carefully with warm water and soap; rinse and dry thoroughly. Make sure you dry completely between the toes.

- **Be careful as you trim your toenails.** File straight across. Think about going to see a podiatrist; he or she can do your regular foot care.
- **Do not use products for corn or callus removal; be sure never to try to trim calluses yourself.** Try to figure out pressure points that might be causing a callus. Then, be sure to stop that pressure. See a foot doctor for treatment.
- **Moisturize feet that are dry.** If the skin on your feet is dry, a moisturizing cream will help. But, you should apply it sparingly. Never apply it between the toes.
- **Inspect your feet daily.** Be on the lookout for: cuts; red spots, warm spots, or hot spots; calluses or corns; ingrown toenails; change in color; or any other abnormalities.
- **Never go barefoot; always wear shoes to cover your feet.**
- Finally, **make sure your shoes fit right.** Shoes that are too tight can cause blisters and calluses; shoes that are too loose can also cause ulcers or blisters as they rub against the foot. Make sure socks aren't rubbing, either.

When you examine your feet every day, see if there is anything of concern:

- a new sore
- an irritated spot that is not getting better
- a break in the skin.

If it does, then you should see your doctor or health care professional. There are many ways to treat foot problems. They are: medicine; bed rest, with raising of the legs or feet; scraping or cutting away dead tissue; putting on a cast; special shoes; or surgery. You would need an amputation only in some severe cases; this is when there is out of control disease (either infection or gangrene).

*****Authored by Johns Hopkins University and Johns Hopkins Health System*****