

DIABETES AND FOOT CARE

Statistics show that 1 in 5 people with diabetes who go to the hospital do so for foot problems. To help keep your feet healthy, you need to control your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. Diabetes causes damage to your nerves and reduces blood flow (circulation) to your feet. Damaged nerves (neuropathy) and poor blood circulation that often accompany elevated blood sugar can lead to many concerns with the feet. Two of the main health concerns with Diabetics are Neuropathy and Peripheral Vascular Disease.

Peripheral Vascular Disease (PVD)/Peripheral Artery Disease:

1 in 3 people with diabetes who are older than 50 has clogged arteries in the legs, a condition known as peripheral artery disease, also called peripheral vascular disease (PVD). Narrowed arteries diminish blood flow to the lower legs and feet. This can lead to pain in your lower legs (claudication). The loss of blood flow to the feet can prevent wounds or ulcers from getting the oxygen and nutrients they need to heal, allowing them to grow and spread which left unchecked can lead to gangrene requiring amputation

Diabetic Neuropathy:

According to [the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases](#), neuropathy occurs in about 70 percent of people with diabetes, and its symptoms can result in harmful infections, which if left untreated, can require amputation.

Diabetic neuropathy happens when the feet can't send information to the brain because they've become numb from overexposure to blood sugar. Cuts, bumps, and other injuries that once would have made you wince in pain go unnoticed when your feet lose their feeling. If you can't feel these irritations and wounds, you may not be aware of them unless you assess your feet daily.

Neuropathy is the cause of the dry skin experienced by many diabetics: The disabled nerves in your feet [can't receive the brain's message](#) to sweat. Dry feet crack, which makes it possible for germs to enter the body. Nerve damage can also cause changes to the shape of your feet, which can make previously comfortable shoes hard to walk in. Friction can create callouses and bunions which can expose skin to germs. Diabetes also causes the blood vessels to shrink and harden. This can make it harder to fight infections in your feet.

Symptoms (lower leg and feet) that require assessment by a health professional might include:

- a loss of feeling
- numbness or tingling sensation in lower legs, feet, or ankles
- blisters or other wounds without pain
- skin discoloration and temperature changes
- red streaks
- sores, cuts, or ulcers with or without drainage
- changes in the shape of your feet
- staining on socks
- swelling in the foot or ankle
- temperature changes in the feet
- persistent sores on the feet
- pain, or cramps in your lower legs, feet, or ankles
- ingrowing toenails
- athlete's foot or other fungal infections of the feet
- dry, cracked skin on the heels
- signs of infection,
 - Charcot's foot (weakening of the bones in the foot due to nerve damage), which alters the shape of the feet as bones in the foot and toe shift or break

If an infection develops, a person may also experience some of the following:

- fever
- chills
- uncontrollable blood sugar
- shaking
- shock

- redness

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOOT CARE:

DON'T:

- Wear shoes that are too tight, or rub because they are loose. They can cause pressure areas or blisters. Stones or other objects in shoes can also hurt your foot.
- Leave sharp objects on the floor or ground. If you step on a sharp object it may cause a wound.
- Expose yourself to extreme temperatures. Hot and cold temperatures can cause a burn or frostbite. You can burn your feet if bath water is too hot. You can get frostbite if your feet are too cold in the winter.
- Cross your legs .If you do, cross at your ankles not your knees
- Go barefoot. Wear a pair of well-fitting shoes inside
- Use over-the-counter medications to treat corns and warts. They are not safe for people with diabetes.
- Wear anything tight around your legs, such as tight socks or knee-highs.
- Do not use hot water bottles or heating pads on your feet.
- Do not smoke. Smoking decreases blood flow and healing. It also increases the risks of amputation.
- Do not use over-the-counter insoles. They can cause blisters if they do not fit well.

DO:

- Check and protect your feet daily. Feel for differences in the temperature of your feet.
- Check for objects inside your shoes before you put them on
- Wear shoes that fit well all the time, both inside and outside your home. They should be supportive, have heels lower than 5 cm (2 inches), and should not rub or pinch. Shop at a reputable store with knowledgeable staff who can professionally fit your shoes.
- Get professional nail care if you have foot care concerns
- Wash your feet in warm (not hot) water, using a mild soap. Do NOT soak your feet, as this can make your skin more fragile and susceptible to infection, through making it too dry or too soft
- Clean cuts or scratches with mild soap and water. After drying, cover them with a dry dressing
- Dry your feet well making sure to dry between your toes
- Check the top and bottom of your feet and between your toes for cuts, cracks, ingrown toenails, blisters, etc. Use a hand mirror to see the bottom of your feet, or ask someone else to check them for you.
- Trim your toenails straight across and file any sharp edges. Do NOT cut your nails too short.
- Apply a moisturizer (lotion) on dry or hardened skin at the top and bottom of your feet. Do NOT put moisturizer between your toes as it can encourage fungus to grow
- Wear fresh clean socks and well-fitting shoes every day. If possible, wear white socks so if you have a cut or sore, the drainage will be easy to see. Think about buying Diabetic Socks
- Try to keep legs and feet elevated when sitting
- Exercise daily to help your circulation. Wiggle your toes, rotate your ankles, and point your toes up towards your nose, then down towards the floor. Try exercises such as walking or swimming, that don't put too much pressure on your feet.
- Check the condition of your shoes – check that seams are not coming apart
- Do buy your shoes in the late afternoon (since your feet swell slightly by then).

- Use your elbow to check the water temperature before getting into the tub or shower. If you have neuropathy you may scald your foot if water is too hot
- Look for shoes with more depth in the toe box, good coverage of both top and bottom, and without seams inside the shoe that can rub on your foot. Likewise, seek socks without seams, preferably socks that are padded and made from cotton or another material that controls moisture.
- Remove wet or sweaty socks or shoes immediately
- See a podiatrist regularly to treat foot problems
- Control your blood sugar levels. There's a direct relationship between blood sugar level and damage to the nerve cells
- Treat corns and bunions carefully. Never shave corns, as this increases the risk of infection