

# Diabetes and your feet

## Why are my feet at risk?

- **Diabetes can cause narrowing of the blood vessels** causing less blood to reach your feet. This can make you more vulnerable to infection and problems healing after even minor injury.
- **Diabetes can also cause nerve damage and a loss of pain sensation** in your feet. This can be dangerous because you might not notice injury to your feet which might get worse without treatment and care.

## How can I look after my feet?

Prevention is the key to protecting your feet:

- **Blood sugar levels:** keep your blood glucose levels within your target range – this will lessen the likelihood of developing foot problems.
- **Take your diabetes medication as directed:** this will help to control your diabetes.
- **'Test your senses':** your diabetes team should test your sensory nerves including in your feet, at least once a year.
- **Don't walk barefoot:** keep shoes or sandals on to prevent you stepping on a sharp object.
- **Don't burn your feet:** avoid using hot water bottles or sitting with your feet exposed to direct heat sources – you might injure your feet without being aware of it.
- **Check for sharp objects inside your socks and shoes:** use your hand to check them before putting them on.
- **Cut or file your toenails straight across:** if this is difficult for you, ask your chiropodist or podiatrist for advice.
- **Stop smoking:** smoking is particularly dangerous for people who have diabetes. Smoking further increases your already higher risk of heart disease and of many other diseases. Your GP surgery or a smoking cessation service such as Cambridge OASIS (Tel: 01223 723 022) can help you to stop smoking permanently.

## Daily footcare

Even if you are visiting a chiropodist or podiatrist regularly, you should still look after your feet in between. A daily foot check can prevent many problems.

- **Check your feet every day** in good light for signs of pressure or small injuries. If this is difficult for you, try using a mirror or ask a relative or friend to help.
- **Wash your feet daily with warm water:** make sure it is not too hot (use a thermometer) - it should be less than 42°C.
- **Dry your feet thoroughly but gently between the toes.**
- **Use neutral moisturising cream on your feet everyday** (eg 50% soft paraffin or liquid paraffin). Don't apply cream between your toes because it can encourage infection.
- **Keep your footcare simple:** avoid using medicated corn pads, lotions, ointments and footbaths.
- **Change your socks, stockings or tights every day** for good foot hygiene.

## Minor wound care

- **Dress even minor wounds:** If you get a small cut or abrasion, clean the affected area carefully. Cover it with a clean, dry dressing and change this daily.

- **Get help for wounds:** If a minor foot wound is not healing after a couple of days, contact your GP, nurse or state-registered podiatrist for advice.

## Footwear advice

- **Wear well-fitting comfortable shoes:** Make sure your shoes are well fitting and supportive. They shouldn't rub or cause blisters. Have your feet measured by a competent shoe-fitter who can advise on the suitability of the footwear for your needs. Your chiropodist can recommend a local specialist.
- **Swollen feet:** If your feet tend to swell during the day, you might need to change your footwear for another larger pair during the day.
- **Types of shoes:** shoes that have soft leather uppers are a good choice. Some people find trainers very comfortable to wear. Wear well-fitting shoes rather than slippers around the house.
- **Avoid open-toe sandals or just wearing socks:** they do not offer sufficient protection.

## When to seek help

If you notice any of the following, you should contact your GP, nurse or state-registered podiatrist:

- **Hard skin:** A build-up of hard skin (callus) or corns – this might need attention.
- **Colour change:** in the toes or foot – this might be a sign of low circulation.
- **Warmth, redness or swelling:** especially if you have a wound in that area – you might have an infection or be at risk of getting one.
- **Discharge:** if you have a discharge from a wound, seek help because you probably have an infection.
- **Pain:** this can indicate a problem in that area. However, if your sensation in your feet is reduced because of your diabetes, you might not feel pain as you normally would.

### For further information contact:

- **Diabetes UK:** 10 Parkway, London NW1 7AA; Careline 0845 1202 960;  
[www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)
- **Your GP:**
- **Your nurse:**
- **Your dietitian:**
- **Your podiatrist/chiropodist:**