

Diabetic Foot and Skin Care

Why Worry?

Poor blood glucose (sugar) control increases risk for skin and foot infection. Nerve damage due to diabetes also makes you less likely to feel pain. If the foot or skin is injured, wounds may heal slowly. If the wound is not treated correctly, severe infection can lead to gangrene and amputation.

What Needs to Be Done?

Wash your feet and skin daily with nondrying soap. Test the water with your elbow instead of your hand or foot to make sure that it is not too hot. Pat yourself dry. Use lotion on your feet and skin, but not between your toes. Lotion between the toes helps bacteria to grow.

Inspect your feet and skin daily. Look for the following signs:

- Red spots
- Dry skin
- Calluses
- Flaking skin
- Cuts
- Ingrown nails

If you cannot see your entire foot, use a mirror, or have someone else look for you. Call the doctor if you are concerned about any wound. If the problem is serious, you may need to see a podiatrist, who specializes in foot care, or a dermatologist, who treats skin problems.

To Prevent Foot Injuries

- Never go barefoot, even for a short distance.
- Shop for shoes in the late afternoon, when your feet tend to be larger.
- Always wear comfortable shoes that have been broken in slowly.
- Wear flat shoes with good arch support and a wide toe base.
- Rarely, if ever, wear high-heeled shoes.
- Wear shoes made from leather with cotton socks.
- Shake out your shoes before you put them on, to remove any object that may have gotten into them, such as a pebble or tack.
- Cut toenails straight across, and file off rough edges. Have a podiatrist (foot doctor) or nurse trained in foot care do this if your nails are too thick to cut.
- Only have the doctor treat corns, calluses, or ingrown toenails. Never treat them yourself.
- Wear wool or cotton socks to keep your feet warm and dry. Throw away heating pads and hot water bottles. They could burn your feet and skin.

- Each time you see the doctor, take off your shoes and socks. Most of all, get your diabetes under good control. You may need help from your medical team with your meal plan, exercise, or diabetes medicine. All the foot and skin care in the world is worthless if you don't manage your diabetes well.

Questions to Ask

1. Do I inspect my feet daily for wounds or infection?
2. Do I wash and care for my feet and skin properly?
3. Does my doctor examine my feet each time I visit?
4. Do I choose the right shoes?
5. Is there anything that I can do to improve my diabetes control?