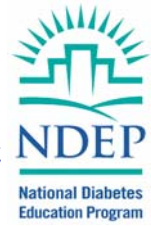


Putting Your Best Foot Forward: Choosing Shoes to Prevent Diabetic Foot Problems



If you do not have claw or hammertoes, bunions, fallen arches, or other problems with the bones in your feet, you can probably get by with high-quality athletic or walking shoes bought at a regular shoe department. It is important that these shoes NOT have more than a 2-inch heel and that the outer sole be made of soft material. In fact, the best heel height is 3/4 inch or less. Thin leather soles are almost as harmful to your feet as walking barefoot.

A shoe with laces or a Velcro closure will allow you to loosen your shoes if your feet swell during the day. In fact, shop for new shoes late in the day so you can adjust for any swelling. Most people have one foot larger than the other, so fit your shoes to the larger foot. Everyone's feet change over time, so always have your feet measured by an experienced sales person each time you shop for new shoes.

To be sure that you have chosen the right shoes, have the fit checked by a health professional who knows about diabetic foot care. If you have neuropathy, shoes may feel too big even though they are too small. You may also need a prescription insole for the shoes. Many people who need extra cushioning get by with just a soft flat insole with 1/8–1/4 inch of extra padding. This insole will need to be changed at least every 4–6 months. Another option is an orthotic insert that can make standing, walking, and running more comfortable by changing how your foot strikes the ground. An orthotic is made from a mold of your foot prepared by a trained foot care professional.

Shoe choice gets real tricky if you do have any foot problems. If your problems are minor, you may just need some extra depth in the toe area. But for serious foot problems, you will probably need a shoe that is specially molded or that has uppers with material that can stretch. You may also need special insoles up to 3/4-inch thick. If pressure while walking is a factor, you may need a rocker or roller outer sole.

Check with your insurance company to see if they will pay for special shoes if your doctor certifies that you need them because of your diabetes.

No matter what shoe you buy, it should be comfortable from the moment you first put it on. But take time to break the shoes in slowly even if they fit well. Wear the new pair for 1 hour in the morning and 1 hour in the afternoon for 3 days. Then slowly add extra hours morning and evening until you are up to your normal wearing time.

Podiatrists recommend that you have at least two pairs of shoes so you can change at least once a day. When you do change shoes, remove your socks and look for any red spots. If the redness does not disappear in 15 minutes, go to your foot care professional for a shoe adjustment. The most common cause of amputation is foot ulcers caused by shoes that don't fit.

There are also things you can do at work to protect your feet. Name some of the things that you might do to reduce your risk for injury.

Your feet support you 365 days a year. By taking a little time every day to care for them, you will ensure that they will continue to serve you well for a long time.

For more information see the "Foot Care" handout and visit: "Take Care of Your Feet for a Lifetime"

http://ndep.nih.gov/campaigns/Feet/Feet_overview.htm

Source: Cooperative Extension Service, the University of Georgia, College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences and the College of Family and Consumer Sciences