DIABETES CANADA

Foot care: A step toward good health

Diabetes and your feet

Diabetes can cause nerve damage (also known as diabetes peripheral neuropathy) and poor blood flow or circulation to the legs and feet (also known as peripheral arterial disease). As a result, people with diabetes are less likely to feel a foot injury, such as a blister or cut. Diabetes can make these injuries more difficult to heal. Unnoticed and untreated, even small foot injuries can quickly become infected, potentially leading to serious complications.

Foot problems are very common in people with diabetes and can lead to serious complications. This fact sheet provides basic information about how diabetes affects your feet and what you can do to keep your feet healthy.

Daily foot care

As always, prevention is the best medicine. A good daily foot-care routine and good blood sugar control will help keep your feet healthy.

Start by assembling a foot-care kit containing nail clippers, nail file, lotion, and a non-breakable hand mirror. Having everything you need in one place makes it easier to follow this foot-care routine every day:

- Wash your feet in warm (not hot) water, using a mild soap. Don't soak your feet, as this can dry your skin.
- Dry your feet carefully, especially between your toes.
- Thoroughly check your feet and between your toes to make sure there are no 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.
- Clean cuts or scratches with mild soap and water, and cover with a dry dressing suitable for sensitive skin.
- Trim your toenails straight across and file any sharp edges. Don't cut the nails too short.
- Apply a good lotion to your heels and soles. Wipe off excess lotion that is not absorbed. Don't put lotion between your toes, as the excessive moisture can promote infection.
- Wear fresh clean socks and well-fitting shoes every day. Whenever possible, wear white socks – if you have a cut or sore, the drainage will be easy to see.

When to see your doctor

If you have any corns (thick or hard skin on toes), calluses (thick skin on bottom of feet), in-grown toenails, warts or slivers, have them treated by your doctor or a foot-care specialist (such as a podiatrist, chiropodist or experienced foot-care nurse). Do not try to treat them yourself.

If you have any swelling, warmth, redness or pain in your legs or feet, see your doctor or foot specialist right away.

Have your bare feet checked by your doctor at least once a year. In addition, ask your doctor to screen you for neuropathy and loss of circulation at least once a year.

Take your socks off at every diabetes-related visit to your doctor and ask him or her to inspect your feet.

Best advice

Do	Don't
Wear well-fitting shoes. They should be supportive, have low heels (less than 5 cm high) and should not rub or pinch. Shop at a reputable store with knowledgeable staff who can professionally fit your shoes.	Use over-the-counter medications to treat corns and warts. They are dangerous for people with diabetes.
Buy shoes in the late afternoon (since your feet swell slightly by then).	Wear anything tight around your legs, such as tight socks or knee-highs.
Wear socks at night if your feet get cold.	Ever go barefoot, even indoors. Consider buying a pair of well-fitting shoes that are just for indoors.
Elevate your feet when you are sitting.	Put hot water bottles or heating pads on your feet.
Wiggle your toes and move your ankles around for a few minutes several times a day to improve blood flow in your feet and legs.	Sit or cross your legs for long periods of time.
Exercise regularly to improve circulation.	Smoke. Smoking decreases circulation and healing, and significantly increases the risks of amputation.
Inspect your feet daily and in particular, feel for skin temperature differences between your feet.	Wear over -the- counter insoles - they can cause blisters if they are not right for your feet.

Contact Diabetes Canada for additional resources.

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diabetes.ca | 1-800 BANTING (226-8464) | info@diabetes.ca

Diabetes Canada is making the invisible epidemic of diabetes visible and urgent. Eleven million Canadians have diabetes or prediabetes. Now is the time to End Diabetes - its health impacts as well as the blame, shame and misinformation associated with it. Diabetes Canada partners with Canadians to End Diabetes through education and support services, resources for health-care professionals, advocacy to governments, schools and workplaces, and, funding research to improve treatments and find a cure.

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