

## FOOTCARE

People with diabetes are more likely to be hospitalised due to foot problems than for any other reason.

The longer you have diabetes and as you age your feet can be affected in two major ways.

### Circulation

Arteries are pipes that carry blood around the body from the heart. A healthy circulation is necessary to allow cuts and sores to heal. Smoking, high blood fats and raised blood sugar levels can cause hardening or narrowing of the arteries as the pipes become clogged up. This may result in cold feet, painful legs when walking or painful feet in bed at night. It may also result in slower healing if there is an injury. If the circulation is severely affected even minor wounds may not heal. In extreme cases this can lead to death of tissue (gangrene) and amputation of the affected part eg toe may be necessary.

### Nerve Supply

The nerves carry messages from a part of the body to the brain, warning of danger. The ability to feel pain or heat or cold protects us from injury. The nerves to the feet are the longest and the most likely to be affected by diabetes. Damaged nerves (neuropathy) can cause painful, numb or insensitive feet. Minor cuts, blisters, or burns may not be felt and ulcers can develop. It is hard to believe but if the nerve is damaged there could be an injury to the foot and unless the feet are being regularly checked the foot owner may not be aware of it.

**It is for these reasons you need to take special care of your feet.**

## Daily Foot Care

### Inspect feet daily

- Carefully look at the top of your feet, check between your toes and if necessary use a mirror to check underneath your feet. Look at both feet and compare the size, colour and temperature. Wash feet every day and dry between the toes well. If there is excessive moisture between the toes use methylated spirits. Use moisturising cream (eg. Sorbolene cream) to dry skin especially on cracked heels but *not between the toes*.



- Corns or callouses may be treated with careful use of a pumice stone.
- Avoid walking barefoot and reduce the risk of injuring your feet.
- Socks should fit properly and cushion the feet. Make sure the tops are not too tight. Be careful that seams do not rub you feet.
- Wear well fitting leather shoes. Check inside to ensure there is no torn lining or foreign objects in the shoe before putting them on.
- Toenails should be cut carefully by following the normal shape of the nail. A podiatrist should cut your toenails if you can't easily see or reach your feet or if toenails are thick or ingrown.

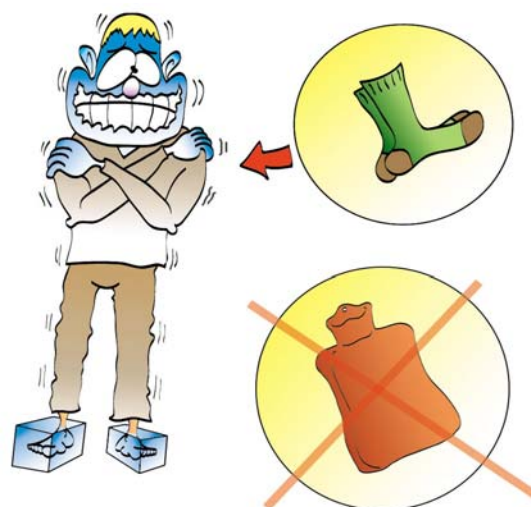
### Avoid Injury

- Wear well fitting shoes- all shoes including new ones should be comfortable, not rub or cause feet to ache.
- Shoes should be fitted so that they are long enough, wide enough, and deep enough.
- If one foot is larger than the other fit the shoes to the larger foot. An insole can be used to help the smaller foot fill out its shoe.

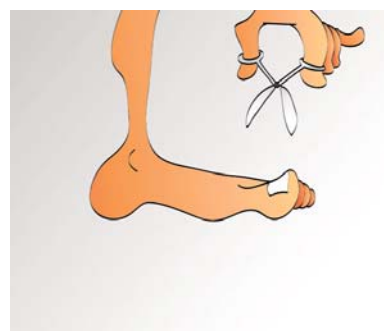


- Walk around the shoe shop checking there are no pressure areas and don't be rushed into buying shoes that you are not 100% happy with.
- Never go barefoot. Wear appropriate shoes to protect your feet e.g. sandals for the beach, heavy shoes for gardening or walking shoes for walking.

- For cold feet at night wear bed socks rather than use a hot water bottle.
- Be very careful not to toast your feet in front of radiant or reflector heaters. Check bath water with your elbow before plunging feet in (just in case the nerves are not working fully)
- A Podiatrist should treat corns and callouses or other foot problems. Remember to tell him/her that you have diabetes.



- Feet should be examined regularly for any signs of nerve damage or poor circulation. Your doctor or podiatrist should do this at least yearly.



Contact your doctor immediately should you develop pain, throbbing, heat, swelling or discolouration of your feet.

## First Aid

### If you do cut your foot treat it immediately.

1. Clean the area with a safe antiseptic such as Betadine, or Liquid Savlon
2. Cover with clean gauze and surgical tape or suitable packaged dressing such as Hansapor Steril or Cutiplast rather than bandaids.
3. Change and check at least daily.

See your doctor if the cut becomes red, looks infected or is not healing within two days.

## Improve Circulation

- Blood fat levels can be reduced by a healthy diet, which is low in fat, and by good blood sugar control.
- Keep blood sugar levels as close to normal as possible.
- Avoid smoking. Smoking causes spasm and narrowing of blood vessels and smokers have more heart attacks, strokes and circulation problems than non-smokers. Do your feet a favour and stop smoking.
- Exercise daily. A brisk walk will help keep the blood flowing around the body. Avoid garters or socks with tight tops.

## Podiatrists

Experts in looking after feet and lower limbs are called podiatrists. They are highly trained health professionals who are trained to deal with the prevention, diagnosis and management of foot problems.




If you are unable to see your feet easily or reach your feet you should see a podiatrist regularly to cut your toenails.

A podiatrist should treat any foot problems such as corns or callus or ingrown and/or thickened toenails.

If you have problems with shoes due to overriding or hammertoes, bunions or other problems a podiatrist will be able to help you.

You may have heard it said that diabetes causes gangrene. Most cases of gangrene result from delayed treatment of foot injuries.

**YOU ONLY HAVE TWO FEET AND AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE.**

-  **Prompt attention can prevent foot problems.**
-  **People with diabetes should see a podiatrist at least once a year. If you have problems with your circulation and/or nerve damage to your feet you should see a podiatrist more often.**
-  **You don't need a referral to seek advice or treatment from a podiatrist.**