



patienthandout

NOTES

Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.

Caring for the Diabetic Foot

DIABETIC FOOT COMPLICATIONS ARE THE NO. 1 cause of nontraumatic foot amputations in the United States, forcing one in five people with diabetes to enter the hospital. Learning proper foot care can help prevent or delay this occurrence.

In patients with diabetes, blood flow to the feet may be impaired. This means the feet are less able to fight infection. Nerve damage (neuropathy) may exist, causing a lack of sensation in the feet. You may not feel pain—even with injury—predisposing you to foot ulcers and infection. The skin also may become dry, crack and peel easily.

To protect your feet, perform the following on a daily basis:

1. Maintain good blood sugar control

Keeping your blood sugar under good control can help prevent or delay foot complications. This will mean self-management of blood sugars with diet, exercise, medication, blood glucose monitoring and education in other techniques for controlling blood sugar.

2. Inspect your feet daily

Visually check your feet, since you may not feel injuries if you have neuropathy. Look for cuts, sores, red spots, infection or swelling. Use a mirror to see the bottom of your feet, or ask a family member or caregiver for help.

3. Wash and moisturize your feet daily

Warm water is best (about 90-95 F). Use a thermometer or your elbow to assess the temperature. Dry your feet afterwards, particularly the area between the toes. Rub a thick layer of moisturizer on the feet, avoiding the area between the toes. Moisturizing will help prevent your skin from drying and cracking, which can lead to infection. Don't soak your feet, since this will dry the skin.

4. Smooth corns and calluses

After your bath or shower, use a pumice stone to smooth corns or calluses. Avoid tearing the skin, and never cut corns or calluses. Never use liquid corn and callus removers, since they can create a chemical burn. If the calluses become thick, see your health care provider for a referral to a podiatrist (foot doctor) who can trim these for you.

5. Trim toenails regularly

After washing and drying your feet, trim your toenails straight across, then smooth

them with an emery board. Do this weekly. Don't rip off hangnails, and don't cut into the corners, or trim into the quick. You may need a podiatry consult if the nails are thickened and yellow.

6. Avoid going barefoot

Good fitting shoes and socks are some of the best ways to protect your feet. Choose socks made of cotton or wool, since they will "wick" moisture away from your skin. Make sure there are no seams or bumps. Before putting your shoes on, check inside for foreign objects.

Break in new shoes slowly (about an hour a day the first week, increasing wearing time gradually). Choose shoes made of canvas or leather, which let your feet "breathe." Don't buy pointed toes or high heels, which put pressure on the feet. Keep slippers with good soles by your bed to use at night if you get up.

7. Avoid thermal injury

Never use hot water bottles or heating pads on your feet, which cause tissue injury or burns. Wear socks at night if your feet get cold. And put sunscreen on the top of your feet to prevent sunburn. In the winter, lined boots can help keep your feet warm. Check for frostbite if exposed to the cold.

8. Don't constrict circulation

Avoid crossing your legs, or wearing tight socks, garters or constricting garments.

9. Exercise

Walking, swimming and bicycling can enhance blood flow and won't put pressure on the feet. Avoid high impact exercises, such as running or jumping.

10. Schedule yearly visits with your doctor

A health care professional should perform a yearly foot check of pulses, sensation and visual inspection. If you're at higher risk, schedule the foot check more frequently.

If an infection, inflammation, an ingrown toenail or a foot ulcer occurs, see your health care provider immediately.

Every ulcer should be seen by your health care provider immediately, even if you don't feel pain.

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