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Step-by-Step: How to Protect Your Feet When You Have Diabetes

When you have diabetes, any small bruise or scrape on your foot can escalate to a bigger problem. Find out how you can protect your feet.

By Jenilee Matz, MPH, Staff Writer, myOptumHealth



For most people, a stubbed toe or scratch on the foot is no more than a small nuisance. But if you have diabetes, a minor foot injury can become a bigger problem.

This is because diabetes damages the nerves of your feet (diabetic neuropathy). Nerve damage makes it hard to feel pain in your feet when you injure them. Diabetes also causes decreased circulation to the legs, making foot injuries difficult and slow to

heal.

To protect your feet, care for them each day and take special precautions to avoid injury. Follow these steps to keep your feet healthy:

1. Stop foot injuries before they start

- Wash your feet daily with warm soap and water. Dry them well and then apply lotion. Do not put lotion between your toes.
- Keep toenails trim.
- Check your feet every day. Carefully examine the bottoms of your feet. Look for red spots, cuts, blisters, bruises, sores or other injuries. If checking your own feet closely is hard to do, use a mirror or ask someone to help you.
- Treat wounds and cover them with a bandage right away. See your doctor if the cut doesn't heal right away.
- Wear comfortable shoes that fit well. Make sure the insides of your shoes are smooth and nothing rubs against your feet. Do not wear open-toe or open-heel shoes.
- Look at the insides of your shoes carefully and make sure no objects are in them before you put them on your feet.
- Always wear socks with your shoes. Choose socks that are soft, thick, don't have tight elastic

and don't have seams that can rub against your skin.

- Never walk around barefoot. Keep feet covered with shoes and socks, even when you're indoors.
- Test the water temperature with your hand or elbow before you put your feet in. Burns can occur without you feeling them.

2. Increase blood flow to your feet

- Get moving! Exercise increases circulation and it helps control blood sugar levels. Always talk to your doctor first before you start or increase activity.
- Choose activities that are easy on your feet, such as biking, swimming or walking. Avoid any high-impact activity such as running and jumping.
- Walk on soft surfaces, such as grass or dirt instead of pavement. This will help your feet absorb impact.
- Keep your feet elevated when sitting for long periods of time.
- Wiggle your toes and rotate your ankles for five minutes, two to three times each day, to stimulate blood flow.
- Don't sit with your legs crossed.
- Don't wear socks that are too tight around your calves. If they leave a mark on your leg, they're too tight.
- Don't smoke. If you do, quit. Smoking reduces blood flow to your feet.
- Keep your cholesterol levels and blood pressure under control.

3. Work with your doctor

- Review your foot care routine with your doctor and other members of your diabetes care team.
- Ask your doctor to suggest a podiatrist (a foot care doctor). A podiatrist should be part of your diabetes care team. See your podiatrist at least once a year, or as often as your doctor suggests. Your podiatrist will check your feet, trim your nails and care for your calluses and corns. (Never try to remove calluses or corns on your own. This can lead to open sores and infection.)
- Let your doctor know about any changes in how your feet look or feel.
- Take off your shoes and socks each time you visit your doctor for a check-up. This lets your doctor check to make sure your feet are healthy.

Lower your risk of foot problems and other diabetes complications by following your diabetes treatment plan closely. Doing so will keep blood sugar levels in check, which will help prevent nerve damage.

Updated on **Monday, 24 Aug 2009 SOURCES:**

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