

Foot care in diabetes: foot care and footwear for healthy feet

Prepared by Dr Angela Evans, a Podiatrist in private practice, Adelaide, and Lecturer in Podiatry, University of South Australia, Adelaide, and Dr Pat Phillips, Senior Director, Endocrinology, North Western Adelaide Health Service, The Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Adelaide, SA.

If you have diabetes it is important that you take good care of your feet because you are at increased risk of developing foot problems such as ulcers and odd-shaped feet. Daily routine care of your feet will help keep them healthy and will allow you to notice any signs of damage and take the appropriate action.

Routine foot care

Following these guidelines will enable you to reduce the likelihood of a foot problem developing and to detect any problems early so they can be treated.

- **Hygiene.** Wash and dry your feet every day. Pay special attention to the areas between your toes, and be gentle.
- **Skin.** Your skin acts as a barrier to infections. People with diabetes tend to have dry skin, so use a moisturiser on your feet each day after bathing to prevent dry skin and skin cracks. Avoid moisturising between your toes, but apply plenty around your heels. Gentle use of a pumice stone on your feet after showering and before moisturising will help reduce callus build up.
- **Nails.** Your toenails should be cut 'straight across'. If you cannot see and reach your toenails, you will need help. See the box on care providers (over the page) for guidance on when a relative or other carer can look after your feet and when a podiatrist should be doing so.
- **Corns and callus.** Areas of thickened skin are the result of increased pressure in the area and can become ulcers. If you find any areas of thickened skin see a podiatrist and pay attention to your choice of footwear. A callus generally refers to a wide area of thickening of the skin whereas a corn is a thicker and smaller area over a bony region. Thickened nails and areas of redness on the foot are also signs of pressure.
- **Shoes.** Footwear is meant to protect your feet from injury. Protective footwear is especially important if nerve damage has reduced your sense of feeling in your feet. Shoes must fit your feet and not rub. Finding shoes that fit well is more difficult but more important if your feet are a funny shape.
- **Socks, garters.** Check that your socks or pull-up stockings are not acting like 'garters' around your legs and reducing the flow of blood to your feet.
- **Keep walking.** Your feet need to be in good shape to walk, and you need to walk to help your diabetes, weight and blood pressure. Enjoy the fresh air!

Action plans for what you should do if you see a cut, a pressure area, abnormal nails or inflammation during your daily foot care routine are given in the box over the page.

This handout provides guidelines on day-to-day foot care, including the choice of suitable footwear, for people with diabetes.



General foot care equipment includes a pumice stone, mild antiseptic, moisturiser, a nail file and toenail clippers.



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Who does the caring?

Are you able to look after your feet? Do you need help from someone else or a podiatrist? Use the guide below to check.

Care providers in feet and toenail management

Patient self-care	Relative/supporter care	Podiatrist care
You can care for your own feet if you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can see your feet and nails • can reach your feet and nails • have normal nails • have normal circulation 	You should have a relative or other carer look after your feet if you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cannot see your feet and nails • cannot reach your feet and nails • have normal nails • have normal circulation 	You should have a podiatrist look after your feet if you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have abnormal nails • have decreased circulation

Action plans to protect feet from further damage

Warning	Cause	Action
Cuts or abrasions	Damage	Simple first aid: wash and dry the area, apply mild antiseptic and cover with a sterile dressing See doctor if wound is not healing in 48 hours, worsens, becomes inflamed or discharges
Pressure areas – as indicated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recurrent local symptoms • transient redness • blisters • skin and/or nail thickening 	Excess pressure	See podiatrist for footwear advice
Crumbly brittle nails	Fungal infection	See a doctor or podiatrist
Moist or macerated skin between toes	Fungal infection	See a doctor or podiatrist
Inflammation – as indicated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • redness • warmth • swelling 	Infection	See a doctor or podiatrist

What should you be particularly aware of?

- If you have nerve damage, you should be aware of potential foot complications. You should wear appropriate protective footwear and monitor your feet for signs of abnormal pressure or damage.
- If you have decreased circulation, and therefore reduced ability to heal, you should make sure you carry out the appropriate skin and nail care, wear protective footwear and watch for and respond to breaks in the skin of your feet.
- If you have abnormally shaped feet, you should watch for signs of pressure – skin redness and thickened skin and nails – and seek advice on ways to reduce the pressure.

Remember, look after your feet – one pair must last a lifetime!



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