

Diabetes & Your Feet.



Many people with diabetes know that they have to take care of their feet however; they may be confused as to why.

By understanding how and why foot problems develop in diabetes, this will help you to prevent and manage them.

The following information can be read by patients with all forms of diabetes.

How can diabetes affect my feet?

Over a long period of time, high blood glucose levels can cause damage to the nerves in the body. This process of nerve damage is called *neuropathy*.

The nerves that are damaged include:

- Sensory nerves (the sensation in the feet)
- Motor nerves (that supply muscles in the feet)
- Autonomic nerves (control of sweat glands in the skin)

High blood sugar levels can also cause damage to the blood vessels in the body affecting the circulation especially to the lower limbs.

Changes to your nerves:

- Numbness
- Pain
- Hard skin
- Pins & needles
- Changes to the shape of your feet
- Loss of feeling.

Changes to your blood vessels:

- Cramps
- Shiny / smooth skin
- Loss of hair
- Thickened toenails
- Cold / pale feet

- Sores / wounds.

It is recommended to have a diabetic foot assessment performed by a podiatrist. Several tests will be performed to identify any changes that are already present or changes that are likely to occur. The diabetic foot assessments are carried out on an annual basis.

What do the changes mean?

Changes to your nerves may mean that you could not feel sensations that you used to, this includes sharp or blunt, hot or cold sensations. This change could indicate that you may not be able to feel burning to your skin or stepping on a nail or sharp object.

The changes to the muscle may lead you to walk differently leading to hard skin development. Also changes to the muscles may change the shape of your toes giving rise to a clawed appearance.

Your skin may become dryer due to the damaged autonomic nerves affecting your sweat gland production. Finally ulcers may develop due to diminished sensation in your feet causing a potential for bleeding and infection.

CHECKING YOUR FEET.

3 STEPS , 3 MINUTES:

1. CHECK YOUR FEET

Check your feet for a minute to assess if there is any redness, swelling, blisters or wounds that may have developed. Feel the temperature of your feet, look at the colour, feel for lumps or dry cracked skin. Is there any pain? Is there anything stuck to your feet?

2. WASH YOUR FEET

Take a large bowl of warm soapy water. Test the temperature with your elbow. Wash your feet well on the top and bottom and in between your toes. Do this for one minute only, do not soak your feet as the skin can become soggy and blisters or sores may develop. Dry your feet with a towel well, especially in between your toes.

3. MOISTURISE YOUR FEET

With an appropriate foot cream, rub the cream in all over your feet on the tops and bottom only. Avoid in between your toes as it can cause the skin in between to go soggy causing open sores to develop.



What can I do to prevent foot problems?

Preventing problems in the future is about being positive & active now rather than acting when a problem develops.

Your main task is to have good control of your diabetes by checking your blood glucose levels regularly, this helps to slow down the damage caused to the nerves and blood vessels.

- Prevent dry skin
- Prevent callous build up
- Have a diabetic foot assessment.

If injury develops this could potentially lead to an ulcer.

An ulcer is a wound that takes a long time to heal. The skin around the ulcer may look red and you may see deeper tissues inside the ulcer. If the wound becomes infected this could cause an infection into your bones causing a need for amputation. If you recognise an ulcer on your foot please contact a podiatrist straight away to help prevent infection.

What can I do now?

- Devise a daily foot checking routine.
- Visit your chiropodist / podiatrist for a diabetic foot assessment.
- Wear socks & shoes that are not too tight.
- Keep a look out for ulcers.
- Familiarise yourself with the diabetes website:

www.diabetes.org.uk

www.diabetes.co.uk

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