



Put your healthiest foot forward

Diabetes foot care

When you have diabetes, even a minor cut on your foot can turn into a major infection. You'll be one step ahead of any problems if you know your risks and how to treat injuries.

Foot ulcer facts

A small injury can make an area of your skin break down, so you see the tissue underneath. This is called a foot ulcer. About 1 in 10 people with diabetes will get a foot ulcer. The good news is that they often respond well to treatment. However, they can take a long time to heal and they can easily get infected. So it's important to prevent them whenever possible. **Here's why:**

- **Reduced sensation/feeling in the feet**
 - The nerves in your feet can be damaged from high blood sugar over time. It's possible that you may not even notice small wounds on your feet because you won't be able to feel them.
- **Narrowing of blood vessels going to the feet**
 - Diabetes can also cause "furring" or narrowing of the arteries (peripheral vascular disease). This can result in less blood flow to the feet, which slows healing.

The risks

When you know the risks for foot ulcers, it's less likely that you'll get one.

Here are a few things to watch out for:

- Less feeling or sensation in your feet
- Narrowed arteries
- A past foot ulcer
- Kidney, eye problems or other diabetes complications
- If your feet get minor cuts, corns, calluses or bunions easily
- Leg problems that affect the way you walk or stop you from bending (making you less flexible and able to care for your feet properly)

What to do if you get a foot ulcer

If you suspect a foot ulcer, contact your doctor right away. Most ulcers will respond well to the right care. Here's some of the treatment you can expect:

- Covering the ulcer with a protective dressing
- Regular appointments to clean and re-dress wound
- Proper removal of hard skin that prevents the ulcer from healing
- Special shoes, or a cast, to keep pressure off the foot
- Antibiotics, if there is infection
- A small operation to remove damaged tissue
- Widening the arteries in the legs

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Foot care tips

If you care for your feet and avoid injuries, you're a lot less likely to get foot ulcers.

Here are some tips:

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- ✔ **Focus on the feet** Try to keep your feet warm. Look carefully at your feet each day, even between the toes. Call your general practitioner, chiropodist or podiatrist if you see bruises, cuts, bleeding, swelling or signs of infection.

 - ✔ **Groom carefully** Clip along the curve of your nails, never straight across. If you can't do it easily, ask for help or visit a chiropodist or podiatrist regularly.

 - ✔ **Buy the right footwear** Pick comfortable, wider-fitting shoes with enough room that your toes don't rub against your skin. Choose closed toe footwear instead of slip-on shoes, pointed toes, sandals and flip-flops.

 - ✔ **Don't go barefoot** Always wear socks or hosiery with your shoes. And don't walk barefoot, even at home, in case you step on something that could puncture or damage your skin.

 - ✔ **Cool off** Avoid foot burns by testing bath water with your hand before stepping in. Don't use hot-water bottles and foot spas; they can cause a loss of feeling in your feet which may lead to burns and scalds.

 - ✔ **Pamper your feet** Wash your feet regularly and dry them well, especially between the toes. Don't forget to moisturise your feet to prevent dry skin and cracking. However, don't put lotion between your toes.

 - ✔ **Go for a yearly diabetic checkup** Your local doctor or hospital will monitor your condition, including circulation and foot sensation.
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Take charge of your diabetes —
get on the path to a healthier you today.

Source: Diabetes, Foot Care and Foot Ulcers. Available at www.patient.co.uk. Accessed 25 January 2017.

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