

Foot health for people with diabetes

Patient and Carer Information

Podiatry Service

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Foot care is important

It is important to take care of your feet to reduce the risk of injury and infection. This leaflet provides useful information to help you look after your feet.

There are three main problems which can occur in the diabetic foot:

- a reduced sense of feeling (neuropathy)
- a reduction in blood flow (poor circulation)
- a higher risk of infection.

Neuropathy

Sometimes diabetes can affect the nerve supply to the feet. If neuropathy occurs it can:

- lead to pain or “pins and needles” feeling
- reduce the ability to recognise the difference between heat and cold
- reduce the sensation of touch and pain.

Damage to feet may go unnoticed if feeling is impaired in this way.

Please note that **you may not feel pain at all**.

Circulation

Diabetes may also affect the circulation (blood supply) to the feet.

The arteries may narrow, reducing the flow of blood to the feet and legs. When this occurs it may cause a wound or may slow down the healing of wounds. It can also cause discomfort in the legs and feet. The risk of developing problems is greatly increased by smoking.

Smoking in conjunction with diabetes is particularly dangerous to the circulation

Infection

Small injuries to the skin can become infected more easily than in someone who does not have diabetes. This is because of high blood sugar levels. The wounds may take longer to heal. If they are then left untreated they could lead to more serious complications, for example ulceration, deep infection or gangrene.

Having diabetes does not necessarily mean that you will develop any of these complications. Most people who have diabetes have healthy feet all their lives.

However, always remember that **prevention is better than cure**.

How to care for your feet

Keep your feet clean

Wash your feet daily with mild soap and water - **do not** use hot water.

Always check the temperature of the water (with your elbow or water thermometer) **before** you put your feet in the water. This is because your sense of feeling may be reduced.

Dry your feet well

Use a soft towel to dry your feet. Pay particular attention to the area between your toes.

Do not rub too vigorously as this may cause an injury.

Apply skin cream

If your skin is dry or rough apply a moisturising cream daily, especially after washing your feet. Avoid using moisturising creams between your toes. You can use most non-perfumed hand creams or body lotions on your feet.

Wear well-fitting shoes

Make sure footwear is wide enough, deep enough and long enough, with adequate fastening to prevent your foot from slipping and rubbing inside the shoe.

Try to buy shoes with a complete upper so that there are no seams or stitching which may rub on your toes.

Inspect footwear

Inspect the insides of footwear before putting them on to check for nails, seams, etc. which may stick into or rub your feet. Check for anything that may have got into your shoes since you last wore them.

- Change socks or stockings daily.

Cutting your nails

Always take great care when cutting your toe nails. Cut the nails straight across – never cut them too short or down into the corners. Use a nail file after cutting. Use a long emery board or nail file and file the nails regularly if you find it difficult to cut your nails.

See a Podiatrist

See a Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) Registered Podiatrist for any treatment other than simple toenail cutting.

Check your feet daily

Check your feet each day. You can use a mirror to check the soles of your feet. Ask a relative or friend to check your feet if your eyesight is poor.

Injury

If an injury occurs on your foot, clean the wound at once with warm clean water and cover with a sterile dressing. Seek advice from your doctor or podiatrist if the wound does not show signs of healing within a few days, or if there is any swelling, redness or discharge.

How best to avoid problems

Never neglect the slightest injury

Neglecting a foot injury could lead to infection.

Avoid extremes of temperature

- never put feet on hot water bottles or sit too close to the fire
- Check the temperature of your bath water with your elbow or a thermometer before getting in. Wrap up well when going out in cold weather.

Do not 'break shoes in'

This is bad practice and your feet will suffer. Always make sure shoes are well fitting to start with. Ask at your shoe shop to have your feet measured.

Never wear tight garters or socks

Tight fitting garters or socks, or sitting with legs crossed can constrict the circulation to your feet.

Avoid walking barefoot

Walking in your bare feet will increase your risk of injury.

Do not remove corns or hard skin

Never use corn plasters, corn lotions, knives or razor blades to remove corns and hard skin. This could result in injury to the skin, leading to infection and ulceration.

When to seek help

It is essential that all people with diabetes follow advice regarding all aspects of diabetes care such as diet, medication, smoking and alcohol intake. You can avoid many problems and complications with proper care.

Your podiatrist will always be happy to advise, about any problems or concerns you may have regarding your feet.

However, if any of the following are found during your daily foot check please seek help immediately:

- changes in the normal colour of your leg or foot such as redness or blueness
- any discharge or redness from a break in the skin, from a corn or from under a toenail
- any blistering of the skin
- pain or throbbing in the feet

It may not be necessary for you to attend for treatment with the podiatrist on a regular basis. However, it **is important** that you take up the offer when invited to attend for a podiatry annual review appointment. This enables the podiatrist to assess your feet and any podiatric needs that you may have. The review will also monitor any changes in the circulation and sensation (feeling) in your feet.

Useful information

Appointments or enquiries can be made between 9am and 4pm weekdays only.

Telephone: 01942 483483

Textphone: 18001 01942 483483

We will deal with urgent problems very quickly and at the discretion of the podiatrist, based on the information we receive.

Please contact us if you have any questions or queries that we have not covered in this leaflet.

Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

The Patient Relations/PALS Manager
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary
Wigan Lane
Wigan WN1 2NN

Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use and store the information we hold about you, please take a look at our “how we use your information” leaflet which can be found on the Trust website: https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient_information/leaflets/

This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille and other languages upon request. For more information please ask in the department/ward.

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