

Taking care of your feet

Information for people with Diabetes

People with Diabetes may experience reduced sensitivity to pain, heat and cold; their circulation (blood supply) may also be slower than in people without diabetes of similar age.

Consequently, if foot care is neglected, people with Diabetes are more likely to develop serious foot problems than people without Diabetes. A small painless cut may allow germs to enter and an infection may develop.

Does everyone with diabetes have foot problems?

Not necessarily. Keeping good control of your Diabetes (i.e. good glycaemic control) and stopping smoking can reduce the risk of chronic complications of Diabetes.

People with Diabetes should examine their feet (or ask someone to check them) daily. Remember to check the soles of feet and between the toes. It may help to use a mirror to see soles of feet.

You need to look for changes in colour, swelling, any breaks in the skin, any discharging or broken nails. By checking the feet daily you will learn what is 'normal' for your feet and then find it easier to notice when changes occur.

Consult your GP or practice nurse if you develop a foot problem. They will advise you and may refer you to a Podiatry Clinic.

All Podiatrists (or Chiropodists) working as NHS Podiatrists are Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) Registered. Some Podiatrists work privately - see listings on the HCPC website: www.hcpccheck.org or in the Yellow Pages.

First Aid treatments

- Every break in the skin of the feet may result in a serious problem therefore every effort should be made to prevent injury.
- Minor cuts or abrasions should be cleansed with water and covered with a non-adhesive sterile dressing e.g. CosmoporE.
- Never place a sticky plaster directly onto a wound.
- If a wound / cut does not heal or if it gets worse then ask for professional help.
- DO NOT burst blisters; if they do burst dress them as minor cuts.
- DO NOT wrap any materials around the toes. Some materials shrink when they get moist and may then restrict the circulation.

Ask for help if you notice any of these:

1. Any colour change in your leg or foot
2. Any fluid or discharge from the skin, or nail
3. Any irritation e.g. severe itching or burning
4. Any swelling or throbbing in any part of the leg or foot

In case of Emergency seek medical attention or advice from:

- Your GP or GP out of hour's service
- Coventry NHS Healthcare and Walk in Centre
Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry, CV1 4FH
Telephone: 0300 200 0060
- Accident and Emergency Department
University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire (UHCW), Clifford Bridge Road,
Coventry, CV2 2D

Remember to take care of your feet; examine them daily and ask for help when a problem develops. This may help to prevent major problems!

Self-care

Hygiene - Wash feet daily with a mild soap and water. Do not soak feet for more than five minutes. Clean the free edges of nails and nail grooves with a soft nail brush. Rinse the skin and pat dry with a soft towel. Remember to dry between the toes (cotton buds may be useful for this). Wear dry clean socks and shoes every day and try to change them during the day if they get moist.

Nail Care - If you or a carer cut your toe nails this is generally easier after bathing, as the nails are softer. Cut edges by following the shape of the toes.

DO NOT CUT NAILS TOO SHORT and avoid cutting down the corners of nails. Over time toe nails often become harder, thicker and more difficult to cut. Filing nails at least once a week with a Diamon Deb file or an emery board will reduce the need for cutting and is much safer.

Corns and Callus (hard-skin) - These can develop where there is excessive pressure and should be avoided as much as possible by caring for skin and wearing suitable footwear. Wearing shoes can protect the feet, but ill-fitting or unsuitable shoes can create problems. Make sure there is enough width and depth in the toe box area of your shoe to prevent the toes from being squashed and rubbed. Having a thick outer shoe sole and wearing a cushioned inner sole can help to redistribute pressure.

Use a nail file or emery board when your feet are dry to remove the hard skin from callus and corns. Do it a bit at a time with a gentle pressure and you will see the skin flake off. Keep checking to make sure you haven't reached the soft healthy skin underneath. Only allow a Podiatrist to cut corns or callus; it can be very dangerous to cut these yourself.

Never use corn paints or plasters. These contain acids that can burn the skin and cause serious problems.

Dry Skin - Dry skin may develop calluses, corns or it may crack and split. Improve dry skin by apply a moisturising cream at least daily. Avoid putting cream between the toes as these areas are usually moist.

Moist Skin - Moist skin may be prone to infection. To improve moist skin, take extra care with hygiene and avoid soaking. Wash the feet more often, drying thoroughly and then use a cotton bud to apply Surgical Spirit between the toes. **Do not use surgical spirit on broken skin.** Allow the spirit to evaporate in the air before putting on socks and shoes.

Footwear - Walking with bare feet increases the risk of injury so should be avoided. Infections can develop by 'germs' getting into tiny puncture wounds, which are too small to see. Try to wear a shoe or thick soled slipper indoors to protect your feet. Before putting footwear on, check inside for any sharp edges, objects or holes in the sole.

Pressure from poorly fitting shoes can cause corns, calluses, nail problems and foot ulcers. Even tightly fitting socks and stockings can cramp the toes and may cause problems as toes rub together. Make sure there is enough depth and width in the toe box area of the shoe to prevent the toes being squashed. Wear shoes with lace/buckle/Velcro fastenings to secure the foot and prevent skin damage caused by friction.

Wearing a shoe with a wide weight bearing sole and a low broad heel will offer stability and support and help prevent over use of the soft tissues and excessive foot pressure.

Tips for buying shoes

- Feet do change in shape and size over time so it is important to have your feet measured when buying new shoes. Good shoe shops will measure adult's feet. Have your feet measured whilst you are standing up and in the afternoon, as feet swell a little during the day. Width is just as important as length so don't just buy the next size up.
- Shoes should NEVER need to be 'broken in'.
- When buying new shoes, wear them around the house for about half an hour, then check there are no signs of redness, swelling or irritation on your feet.
- Do not buy new shoes for holidays, wear shoes that you know fit well and have not caused any foot problems.



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