

# FIT FEET

## Steps to healthy foot care



## Why is foot care so important when you have diabetes?

When living with diabetes, it is important to have good blood glucose control. Having too much glucose in the blood can eventually lead to many problems, including foot problems. Foot problems are common in people with diabetes and can lead to a serious condition known as *neuropathy*, damage to the nerves.

When the nerves are not functioning properly, people with neuropathy are less likely to feel a pebble inside their sock, a blister on their foot, or other foot injuries. Foot problems can also occur from wearing ill-fitting shoes, stepping on sharp objects, or even doing normal everyday activities.

Diabetes can also affect the amount of blood flow in the legs and the feet, known as peripheral vascular disease. Numbness and low blood flow in the feet can also lead to problems. When foot injuries are left unnoticed and untreated, even if they are small foot injuries, they can quickly become infected. This can lead to a medical condition known as ulcers.

Walking with foot ulcers and not properly treating the injury will prevent healing. This puts you at risk for developing gangrene, the death or decay of body tissues, which may lead to amputations.

Daily foot care will help you to prevent these problems.

## Daily foot care

Taking care of your feet every day will keep them healthy. You will need a foot care kit, containing:

- nail clippers
- nail file
- lotion
- a pumice stone
- a non-breakable hand mirror

If you have difficulty bending over to see your feet, use a hand mirror to help. You can also ask a family member or caregiver to help you.



Keeping everything you need in one place makes it easier to follow this nine-step foot care routine:



1. Wash your feet in warm (not hot) water, using a mild soap. Do not soak your feet for more than 10 minutes because it can dry out your skin.

2. While your feet are still wet, use a pumice stone to scrub the feet smooth, preventing calluses from forming.



3. Dry your feet carefully, especially between your toes.

4. Use your hand mirror to look at the bottom of your feet. Or, ask someone else to check them for you. Check thoroughly, including between your toes for:

- cuts
- cracks
- ingrown toenails
- blisters
- anything else unusual





5. Clean cuts or scratches with mild soap and water, and cover with a dry dressing suitable for sensitive skin.

6. Trim your toenails straight across and file any sharp edges. Don't cut the nails too short.



7. Apply unscented lotion to your heels and soles. Wipe off any lotion that is not absorbed. Lotion helps to keep your skin supple, but too much moisture can promote infection.

8. Feel the skin temperature on each foot. If the temperature of each foot is different, please contact your doctor, foot care specialist or a member of your healthcare team as soon as possible. Changes in foot temperature could be an indication of infection or circulation issues.



9. Wear clean, white socks as often as you can. That way, if you have a cut or sore, you can easily see any blood spots.

## Caution: foot hazards!

### Do not:



- Wear high heels, pointed-toe shoes, sandals (open toe or open heel), or worn-out shoes.

- Wear tight socks or knee-highs. Tightness around your legs can restrict blood flow.



- Go barefoot. Consider buying a pair of well-fitting shoes that are just for indoors.

- Put hot water bottles or heating pads on your feet.



- Cross your legs for long periods of time.

- Smoking decreases circulation, slows healing, and increases the risk of amputation. If you smoke, plan to quit. For more information about smoking and diabetes, visit <http://www.diabetes.ca/diabetes-and-you/living/management/smoking/>



- Get pedicures from anyone but a healthcare professional.



## Well-fitted shoes are your feet's best friend!

**The best shoe is the one that fits you properly.** People have foot sizes, not shoe sizes. Make sure you have your feet measured every time you buy shoes. Shop at a store with staff who know how to fit your shoes properly. Only buy shoes from a reputable store that offers a warranty on fit and quality. If you have lost sensation in your feet (neuropathy), have your shoes professionally fitted.

Shop for shoes at the end of the day, when your feet tend to be bigger. A shoe that feels comfortable in the morning might feel tight by 5 p.m.

Three things to consider when buying shoes are: length, width and depth. These measurements should be made both while you are standing and while you are sitting.

When the shoe is on your foot and secured, it should feel snug (like a new pair of gloves), but not tight. You should be able to wiggle your toes easily.

Look for shoes that:

- 
- have good support
  - have a firm, low heel (less than 5 centimetres or two inches)
  - cannot be bent or twisted
  - have Velcro fasteners or shoelaces
  - are made out of breathable material (leather, for example)
  - do not rub or pinch
  - have good shock absorption
  - have no seams in the toe box

## More foot tips:

- Wear socks at night if your feet get cold.
- Whenever possible, put your feet up when you are sitting.
- Wiggle your toes and move your ankles around for a few minutes several times a day to improve blood flow in your feet and legs.
- Be active for 150 minutes each week to improve blood flow in your legs and feet. Learn more about physical activity at [diabetesgps.ca](http://diabetesgps.ca).

## My foot self-care checklist

Use this checklist to see if you are currently taking good care of your feet.

	Yes	No	Don't know
I am able to see or reach the bottom of my feet, <b>or</b> I have help from someone who has been taught to do daily foot care.			
I am able to do my own skin and nail care, <b>or</b> I have help from someone who has been taught to do daily foot care.			
I get a foot examination from a health professional each year.			
I wear well-fitted footwear.			
I avoid going barefoot outside or indoors.			
I check for foreign objects in shoes before wearing them.			
Before getting into a bath, I check the water temperature with my wrist or a thermometer (not by using my feet).			

(Adapted from Registered Nurses Association of Ontario. 2004. *Diabetes Foot: Risk Assessment Education Program Participant's Package*.)



## Get foot exams from your healthcare team

Regular foot examination can help you and your healthcare provider to identify potential problems and manage them in a timely way. This can prevent or delay any complications.

Have your bare feet checked by your doctor at least once a year. Your doctor will be checking for neuropathy and loss of blood flow.

Take your socks off at every diabetes-related visit to your doctor and ask him or her to inspect your feet.

You should also visit your doctor when:

- You have swelling, warmth, redness, or pain in your legs or feet.
- You have any corns, calluses, in-grown toenails, warts, slivers or discoloured nails. These can also be treated by a foot care specialist, but you should not try to treat them yourself.
- You have wounds. Depending on the severity of the wounds, you and your healthcare provider should discuss how frequently you should have foot exams.

(Adapted from the Canadian Association of Wound Care.)

## In addition to seeing your doctor, you should also visit a foot care specialist when:

- You have swelling and feel numbness, weakness and redness in your foot or feet.
- There are blisters or a rash on your foot or feet.
- There is a change in color, appearance of feet, skin or toenails.
- The skin is cracked, scaling, peeling or bleeding.
- There is a new ulceration.



## Getting ready for your foot exam

Before visiting your doctor or foot care specialist, come up with a list of things that you would like to talk about. Write your questions below to ask your doctor or foot care specialist.

Make some notes here:

- My main problem(s)

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Take some notes while you are at the visit:

- What do I need to do?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Why is it important for me to do this?

\_\_\_\_\_

### Remember:

- Ask your doctor or foot care specialist to explain anything you do not understand.
- Keep asking for clarification until you are comfortable with what you need to do and why.
- If possible, bring a friend or family member with you to your appointment. Another person may think of other helpful questions.

## Glossary

- **Amputation:** Removing of a limb or part of a limb. People with diabetes are at increased risk of amputation. This is because they often have nerve damage in the legs and feet (diabetic neuropathy). If they do not notice cuts or blisters, the minor wounds can become infected. If they are not treated, it can lead to gangrene. This may require that the affected area be amputated.
- **Gangrene:** The death or decay of body tissues, usually due to the loss of blood supply to the affected body area.
- **Neuropathy:** Nerve damage. With diabetes, nerve damage can occur in the hands and feet. It can cause numbness, weakness, and pain in the hands and feet.
- **Peripheral vascular disease:** A disease of the blood vessels in the arms, legs and feet.
- **Ulcer:** A break in the skin or a deep sore. People with diabetes may get ulcers from minor scrapes on the feet or legs, from cuts that heal slowly, or from the rubbing caused by shoes that do not fit well. Ulcers can become infected and lead to serious problems such as gangrene and amputation.



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