Diabetic Foot: Conducting a Foot Check

If you have diabetes, it's important to take special care of your feet. By Adrianne O'Brien

If you have diabetes, checking your feet is very important. If you don't check your feet for signs of trouble daily, the consequences can be severe, including amputation in extreme cases. By checking your feet daily, you can see any new wounds and monitor healing areas.

Conducting a Foot Check

Here's some basic advice for taking care of your feet:

**Testing for Feeling**

Testing for any change in how well you can "feel" with your feet is important because diabetics can hurt themselves and not be aware of the injury. Use a feather or facial tissue to brush your foot and test its ability to feel light touch. Also, be sure your foot can sense the difference between hot/warm and cold water. Test water with your hand first. Don't soak your feet. Pat each foot dry with a towel.

- Use lotion to keep your feet soft, but don't put any lotion between your toes.
- Trim your toenails straight across. Avoid cutting the corners. Use a nail file or emery board to smooth the tops. If you find an ingrown toenail, see your nurse or doctor.
- Avoid drugstore medications, heating pads or sharp instruments on your feet. Don't put your feet on radiators or in front of the fireplace.
- Keep your feet warm. Wear loose socks to bed. Don't get your feet wet in snow or rain. Wear warm socks and shoes in winter.
- Avoid smoking or sitting cross-legged. Both decrease blood supply to your feet.

Here's some basic advice for shoes and socks:

- Never walk barefoot or in sandals or flip-flops outside.
- Pick your shoes carefully. Buy new shoes late in the day when your feet are larger. Your new shoes shouldn't have a "breaking-in" period. Check how your shoe fits in length, width, back and bottom— they shouldn't be too tight. Avoid pointed-toe styles and high heels. Try to get shoes made of leather. Wear new shoes for only 2 hours or less at a time. Don't wear the same pair every day. Don't lace your shoes too tightly or loosely.
- Choose socks carefully. Wear clean, dry socks every day. Avoid socks with holes or wrinkles. Square-toed socks are best, because they will not buckle within calluses. Any bruises within calluses are particularly important to show to your nurse or doctor.

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Diabetics who have had problems with any of the following need to be especially careful: foot ulcers; toenail infections such as fungus; stress fractures or other single fractures of the foot; slow-healing wounds; bunions; corns and thick calluses. Also, your family history is important. Let your nurse or doctor know if anyone in your family with diabetes had toes, feet or legs amputated.

Take care of your feet. Check them daily and see a nurse or doctor if anything is suspicious.

**Resources**


Adrianne O'Brien is consulting editor at ADVANCE.

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