



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

General Foot Care Information for People with Diabetes

Issued by Northumbria Diabetes Service





Introduction

This leaflet has been produced for people with diabetes. It will provide you with some basic advice on how to care for your feet.

How diabetes can affect your feet

Diabetes can cause your blood sugar level to be higher than normal. Over time, if not properly controlled, these high blood sugar levels can cause complications.

Neuropathy – nerve damage

Damage to the nerves in your feet is the most common diabetic complication. This is called neuropathy. When damage occurs, it can lead to your feet being uncomfortable or painful, or a loss of sensation which makes your feet numb. Unfortunately, if you are unable to feel pain, you may be at risk of injuring your feet without realising it. This is a very common cause of foot ulcers. Once neuropathy occurs it cannot be reversed.

Ischaemia – poor blood supply

When diabetes damages blood vessels, it leads to poor circulation in your legs and feet, often known as peripheral arterial disease (PAD). The arteries in your lower leg have an increased tendency to become narrow so that the blood cannot flow easily to the feet. If your blood circulation is poor, injured skin may not heal easily. A complete obstruction to your blood flow causes the skin to die. This condition is called gangrene. Smoking makes the circulation worse particularly if you have diabetes. It is therefore highly recommended that you stop smoking.

Infection

Diabetes alters your body's ability to fight infection. This means that not only are your feet more prone to infection, but it is also more difficult for you to get rid of foot infections once they are established. Therefore, it is important to have an infection treated with antibiotics as early as possible.

The effects of all of these complications can be slowed down drastically by keeping your blood sugar levels well controlled and by adopting a healthy lifestyle.

Benefits of looking after your feet

Establishing good foot care habits today will help you keep your feet healthy in the future.

Risks

Not looking after your feet can mean that common foot problems can develop into potentially serious complications such as ulceration, gangrene and amputation.

Basic foot care guidelines

- Make sure that you look and check your feet every day. It is important to look for any changes in your feet such as blisters, cuts, redness or swelling. If bending is difficult you may need a mirror to look at the bottom of your feet. If your sight is poor you may need to ask a carer to help.
- Wash your feet daily with lukewarm water and mild soap. Do not soak your feet as this can dry your skin. Dry your feet thoroughly especially between your toes.
- Use moisturising cream daily on your feet, avoiding in between your toes. If the skin is moist or sweaty between your toes then wipe with surgical spirit on cotton wool.

- Avoid exposure to direct heat e.g. hot baths, hot water bottles, fires, electric blankets, foot spas etc.
- Cut your nails to the shape of your toes but not too short. Gently file with an emery board to remove any rough edges. Do not pick or tear the nails as this can create sharp edges which can lead to infection.



You should not cut your own toe nails if your vision is poor, your feet are numb, your blood circulation is poor, or your nails are too thick.

- Do not treat corns or hard skin yourself. The use of corn plasters, razors, knives etc. is extremely dangerous if you have diabetes.
- Make sure your shoes are correctly fitted as new, poorly fitting shoes commonly cause injury.



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Choose shoes with soft uppers and no rough seams. They should have an adjustable fastening e.g. laces or Velcro strap, to prevent the foot from sliding forward.

- Do not walk barefoot – a piece of grit or even a pet hair for example can penetrate the skin, leading to infection.

What to do if you find a problem

Appropriate foot care can help prevent common foot problems and treat them before they cause serious complications. Don't wait for your next appointment in the hope that healing will occur on its own. You should contact your Podiatrist or G.P. if you notice any of the following changes:

- If you find a cut or break in your skin that does not begin to heal in a few days.
- If you discover oozing from under hard skin, cracks or toe nails.
- If your foot or leg becomes red, hot, swollen or painful.
- If you get hot and cold sweats and flu-like aches that suggest infection.

Contact information

Should you need help or advice, contact the Podiatry Service where you are currently receiving your treatment. This may be:

Your GP surgery or local Health Centre

North Tyneside General Hospital

Diabetes Main Reception 0344 811 8118 choose option 1 for appointments.

Wansbeck General Hospital

Diabetes Team Office 01670 5644022

An answer phone is available when there is no-one in the office, please leave a message and we will ring you back as soon as we can.

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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