



## Foot Problems

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Nerve damage, circulation problems, and infections can cause serious foot problems for people with diabetes. There's a lot you can do to prevent problems with your feet. Controlling your blood glucose and not smoking or using tobacco can help protect your feet. You can also take some simple safeguards each day to care for and protect your feet. Over half of diabetes-related amputations can be prevented with regular exams and patient education.

It's helpful to understand why foot problems happen. Nerve damage can cause you to lose feeling in your feet. Sometimes nerve damage can deform or misshape your feet, causing pressure points that can turn into blisters, sores, or ulcers. Poor circulation can make these injuries slow to heal.

## Get your health care provider to check your feet at every appointment

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Ask your health care provider to look at your feet at every appointment. As a reminder, take off your shoes and socks when you're in the exam room. Have your sense of feeling and your pulses checked at least once a year. If you have nerve damage, deformed or misshaped feet, a circulation problem or if you smoke your feet need special care. Ask your health care provider to show you how to care for your feet. Also ask if special shoes would help you.

## Check your feet each day

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You may have serious foot problems yet feel no pain. Look at your feet every day to see if you have scratches, cracks, cuts, or blisters. Always check between your toes and on the bottoms of your feet. If you can't bend over to see the bottoms of your feet, use a mirror that won't break. If you can't see well, ask a family member or friend to help you. Call your health care provider at once if you have a sore on your foot. Sores can get worse quickly.

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## Wash your feet daily

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Wash your feet every day. Dry them with care, especially between the toes. Don't soak your feet. It can dry out your skin, and dry skin can lead to infections. Rub lotion or cream on the tops and bottoms of your feet, but not between your toes. Moisture between the toes will let germs grow that could cause an infection. Ask your health care provider for the name of a good lotion or cream.

## Trim your toenails carefully

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Trim your toenails after you've washed and dried your feet. The nails will be softer and safer to cut. Trim the nails to follow the natural curve of your toes. Don't cut into the corners. Use an emery board to smooth the edges.

If you can't see well, or if your nails are thick or yellowed, get them trimmed by a foot doctor or another health care provider. Ask your health care provider for the name of a foot doctor. If you see redness around the nails, see your health care provider at once.

## Treat corns and calluses gently

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Don't cut corns and calluses. Ask your health care provider how to gently use a pumice stone to rub them. Don't use razor blades, corn plasters, or liquid corn or callus removers. They can damage your skin.

## Protect your feet from heat and cold

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Hot water or hot surfaces are a danger to your feet. Before bathing, test the water with a bath thermometer (90° to 95°F is safe) or with your elbow. Wear shoes and socks when you walk on hot surfaces, such as beaches or the pavement around swimming pools. In summer, be sure to use sunscreen on the tops of your feet.

You also need to protect your feet from the cold. In winter, wear socks and footwear such as fleece-lined boots to protect your feet. If your feet are cold at night, wear socks. Don't use hot water bottles, heating pads, or electric blankets. They can burn your feet. Don't use strong antiseptic solutions or adhesive tape on your feet.

## Always wear shoes and socks

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- Wear shoes and socks at all times. Don't walk barefoot-not even indoors.
- Wear shoes that fit well and protect your feet. Don't wear shoes that have plastic uppers and don't wear sandals with thongs between the toes. Ask your health care provider what types of shoes are good choices for you.
- New shoes should be comfortable at the time you buy them – don't expect them to stretch out. Slowly break in new shoes by wearing them only 1 or 2 hours a day.
- Always wear socks or stockings with your shoes. Choose socks made of cotton or wool. They help keep your feet dry.
- Before you put on your shoes each time, look and feel inside them. Check for any loose objects, nail points, torn linings, and rough areas-these can cause injuries. If your shoes aren't smooth inside, wear other shoes.

## Be physically active

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Physical activity can help increase the circulation in your feet. There are many ways you can exercise your feet, even during times you're not able to walk. Ask your health care team about things you can do to exercise your feet and legs.

## Signs of foot problems

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Your feet may tingle, burn, or hurt. You may not be able to feel touch, heat, or cold very well. The shape of your feet can change over time. There may even be changes in the color and temperature of your feet. Some people lose hair on their toes, feet, and lower legs. The skin on your feet may be dry and cracked. Toenails may turn thick and yellow. Fungus infections can grow between your toes. Blisters, sores, ulcers, infected corns, and ingrown toenails need to be seen by your health care provider or foot doctor (podiatrist) right away.

*Source: Indiana Chronic Disease Management Program*