

# DIABETES AND LOOKING AFTER YOUR FEET



**DiABETES UK**  
KNOW DIABETES. FIGHT DIABETES.

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## **People with diabetes are at risk of having problems with their feet.**

These problems can include foot ulcers or infections.

In the worst cases, complications with your feet can lead to an amputation.

Diabetes causes one amputation every hour in the UK.

This is why looking after your feet is important when you have diabetes.

Taking care of your feet might feel like a big job but these problems can be avoided with regular footcare.

This leaflet will explain what it means to be at risk of a foot problem, how to take care of your feet and what to do if you need help with a foot problem.

# WHY AM I AT RISK?

## **If you have diabetes, you are at risk of having problems with your feet.**

This is because raised blood sugars, raised cholesterol (blood fats) and high blood pressure can affect the feeling in your feet.

This is known as peripheral neuropathy. This can also cause problems with blood flow to your feet, which means cuts, sores and blisters won't heal as quickly.

When you have diabetes, problems with your feet can become serious. This means that damage to your foot could need emergency attention.

You are more likely to develop a serious problem if you have more than one sign of a foot problem – listed on page 8 – or have had an ulcer or amputation before.



# HOW TO CHECK YOUR FEET



You should check your feet every day if you have diabetes. This will help you spot the signs of any problems quickly and stop them from becoming serious complications.

## **To check your feet:**

- Take off your shoes and socks.
- Touch both of your feet and check their temperature. They should both feel the same and not be cold or hot.
- Look at your feet and see if there are any thick, hard areas of skin (calluses), blisters or scabs, or any changes in the shape or colour.
- Check in between your toes for any dry or flaky skin. Look at your toenails too to make sure they're not too long and that they're not digging into the skin.

If you find it difficult to reach your feet or if you have poor eyesight, you could try using a mirror on the floor to help you check the bottoms of your feet. You could also ask a family member, friend or carer to help you check.

You can visit [www.diabetes.org.uk/check-feet](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/check-feet) to watch a video about how to check your own feet every day. Speak to your care team if you are finding it difficult to check your own feet.

# YOUR ANNUAL FOOT CHECK

**You should have a foot check at least once a year. This should be done by a member of your healthcare team, for example your nurse or podiatrist.**

At your foot check, the healthcare professional should look at your whole foot. They should test your feet for numbness or changes in feeling. They might use a tuning fork to do this. They will check the blood flow in your feet and will take pulses in your ankles.

They will also look at your shoes to make sure they are not causing you any problems.

If you haven't had a foot check in the last year, ask your nurse or GP to arrange an appointment.

# SIGNS OF A SERIOUS PROBLEM

A serious foot problem needs urgent attention so it's important that you can spot any signs of a serious problem quickly.

Checking your feet every day will help you spot the signs of a serious problem. If you see any of these changes, you should take the weight off your feet and get help as soon as you can.

Speak to your GP urgently if you notice any of these changes:

- **a tingling sensation or numbness**
- **burning pain**
- **a dull ache**
- **smooth, shiny skin on your feet**
- **hair loss on your legs and feet**
- **loss of feeling in your feet or legs**
- **swollen feet**
- **your feet aren't sweating**
- **wounds or sores that don't heal**
- **cramp in your calves when resting or walking.**

Take the weight off your feet and see your doctor, podiatrist or nurse urgently or go to your local A&E if you notice any of these changes:

**Changes in the colour or shape of your feet**

**Blisters or cuts that you see but don't feel**



**Cold or hot feet**

**A bad smell coming from an open wound**

**My advice to anyone else with diabetes would be to listen to your doctors as they know what they're talking about. I've learnt that I'm not as invincible as I thought I was.**

Jayne, diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, has had operations on both feet due to complications from diabetes.

# REDUCING YOUR RISK OF A SERIOUS FOOT PROBLEM

There are a lot of things you can do to reduce your risk of developing a serious foot problem.

**1** **If you smoke, ask for help to stop.** Smoking makes it harder for blood to flow to your feet.

**2** **Check your feet every day.** Get to know your feet so you can spot any changes quickly and easily. There is more information on page 6 about how to check your feet.

**3** **Manage your blood sugars, cholesterol and blood pressure.** Meeting your targets means it is less likely the nerves and blood vessels in your feet will get damaged.

**4** **Moisturise your feet every day.** This will stop your skin from cracking and getting infected if it's too dry. Use a perfume-free moisturiser, but not between your toes.

**5 Take care cutting your nails.** Cut your nails straight across, not down the sides, and use an emery board on any corners. Don't use any sharp tools, like the point of nail scissors, to clean your nails. Ask your care team for help if you are struggling to cut your own nails.

**6 Don't use blades or corn plasters.** They can damage your skin. Speak to your care team if you need help with corns.

**7 Get expert advice.** You should have a foot check by a healthcare professional at least once a year to see if you're at risk of any problems.

**8 Make sure your footwear fits.** If your shoes or socks are too tight or loose they can rub your feet and cause blisters. Blisters are serious if you have diabetes and can develop quickly.

**9 Eat a healthy, balanced diet and stay active.** Your care team can give you advice about how to eat more healthily. Ask your care team for advice about being active if you have had a previous foot problem or have an active ulcer.

**10 Keep useful numbers handy.** Know what to do and who to call, for example your GP, foot specialist or out-of-hours service, if you have a problem with your feet.

# NEVER IGNORE A FOOT PROBLEM

They can develop quickly and when you have diabetes, it is very important to have them treated as soon as possible.

This will reduce your risk of needing an amputation in the future.


## **For more information about taking care of your feet:**

You can visit our website at

**[www.diabetes.org.uk/your-feet](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/your-feet)**

Or call our helpline on **0345 123 2399**,

**Monday to Friday between 9am to 6pm.**



We welcome your feedback. If any information in this guide has been particularly helpful or if you would like to suggest any improvements, please send your comments to: [helpline@diabetes.org.uk](mailto:helpline@diabetes.org.uk) or write to us at: Diabetes UK Helpline, Wells Lawrence House, 126 Back Church Lane, London E1 1FH