



PLATINUM
HEALTH

How does DIABETES affect the FEET?

Diabetes is a disease in which your blood glucose, or blood sugar, levels are too high. Glucose comes from foods you eat. The cells of your body need glucose for energy. A hormone called insulin helps the glucose get into your cells.

With type 1 diabetes, your body doesn't make insulin. With type 2 diabetes, your body doesn't make or use insulin well. Without enough insulin, glucose can't get into your cells as quickly as usual. The glucose builds up in your blood and causes high blood sugar levels.

Paying attention to your "foot health", which includes recognising early signs of problems and maintaining a healthy blood sugar, lowers the risk for complications.

HIGH BLOOD SUGAR AND THE FEET



Diabetes causes many changes in the body.

The following changes in the feet are common and difficult to treat:

- Damage to the nerves (neuropathy) affects sensation to the feet, so that pain is not felt. Irritation and other forms of injury may go unnoticed. An injury may wear through the skin before any pain is felt.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about half of people living with diabetes will develop some kind of diabetic neuropathy or nerve damage. This damage can occur anywhere in the body, but usually affects the nerves in the feet and the legs.

- Changes in sensation alter the way people with diabetes carry weight on their feet, concentrating weight in certain areas so that calluses form. Calluses (and dry skin) increase the risk of skin breakdown.
- Diabetes can cause poor circulation in the feet, making ulcers more likely to form when the skin is damaged and making the ulcers slower to heal.



In really severe cases, nerve damage from diabetes can trigger a rare condition known as Charcot foot. This typically occurs when a person has an injury, such as a sprain or fracture, that goes unnoticed due to lack of sensation caused by peripheral neuropathy. As the person continues to walk on the injured foot, it causes trauma to the bone.

Beside affecting the nerves and blood vessels, Diabetes also affects ligaments and cartilage in the joints of the foot resulting in deformities as joints become dislocated and collapse. The arch of the foot will often collapse, too, causing a roundness on the bottom of feet.



Signs of Diabetic foot issues include:



- Swelling in your legs or feet
- Tingling, pins and needles sensation in your feet
- Loss of feeling in your feet or legs
- Numbness in your toes
- Sores that don't heal
- Blisters on your feet
- Cracks between your toes
- Corns or calluses
- Developing hammer toe or bunions
- Ingrown toenail
- Changes in skin color on feet
- Peeling or cracking on soles of feet

Treatment options

You can avoid serious diabetes complications by seeing your doctor and getting treatment early for conditions that affect your feet.

You must also proactively manage your sugar levels by taking all your medication.

Other tips to prevent complications include:

- Stay physically active, at least 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Consult a nutritionist or Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE) for meal planning advice.
- Quit smoking.
- Keep your blood pressure and cholesterol within a healthy range.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

GOOD FOOT CARE PRACTICES

Not only should you take steps to keep your blood sugar within a healthy range, you should also take steps to keep your feet healthy.





Tips for Healthy Feet

- **Get to the bottom of any foot problems** by using a mirror or asking for help.
- **Check your feet every day** for cuts, redness, swelling, sores, blisters, corns, calluses, or any other change to the skin or nails. Use a mirror if you can't see the bottom of your feet, or ask a family member to help.
- **Wash your feet every day** in warm (not hot) water. Don't soak your feet. Dry your feet completely and apply lotion to the top and bottom—but not between your toes, which could lead to infection.
- **Never go barefoot.** Always wear shoes and socks or slippers, even inside, to avoid injury. Check that there aren't any pebbles or other objects inside your shoes and that the lining is smooth.
- **Wear shoes that fit well.** For the best fit, try on new shoes at the end of the day when your feet tend to be largest. Break in your new shoes slowly—wear them for an hour or two a day at first until they're completely comfortable. Always wear socks with your shoes.
- **Trim your toenails** straight across and gently smooth any sharp edges with a nail file. Have your foot doctor (podiatrist) trim your toenails if you can't see or reach your feet.
- **Don't remove corns or calluses** yourself, and especially don't use over-the-counter products to remove them—they could burn your skin.
- **Get your feet checked at every health care visit.** Also, visit your foot doctor every year (more often if you have nerve damage) for a complete exam, which will include checking for feeling and blood flow in your feet.
- **Keep the blood flowing.** Put your feet up when you're sitting, and wiggle your toes for a few minutes several times throughout the day.
- **Choose feet-friendly activities** like walking, riding a bike, or swimming. Check with your doctor about which activities are best for you and any you should avoid.
- **Be sure to ask your doctor** what else you can do to keep your feet healthy.

When to see a doctor

Some diabetes foot complications are life-threatening, or they put you at risk of an amputation. See a doctor if you have any concerns or notice unusual changes with your feet.

A seemingly minor issue like cracked skin on your feet, yellow toenails, athlete's foot, or an ingrown nail can become a serious problem if left untreated. Also, see your doctor for any cuts or scrapes that don't heal to avoid an infection on your feet.

The bottom line

Although there's no cure for diabetes, a healthy diet, regular exercise, and taking your medication as instructed can lower your risk for complications.

It's very important to keep your feet healthy when you have diabetes. Check your feet daily for signs of injury or infection, and see your doctor right away if you notice any unusual symptoms.

SOURCE:

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