Living Well with Diabetes

Foot care for people with diabetes

Tools to help you care for your feet

The following items are available at a low cost from your Kaiser Permanente pharmacy. Ask a member of your health care team to show you how to use them to get started on better foot care.

- **Mirror** to check the bottoms of your feet and between your toes
- **Emery board** to file sharp edges and rough spots in your toenails
- **Pumice stone** to smooth out corns and calluses
- **Moisturizer** for the bottoms and tops of your feet

Why good foot care is important

Daily foot care is important for everyone with diabetes. It helps keep feet healthy and prevents infection.

Diabetes often causes nerve damage and circulation problems. Nerve damage can cause tingling or numbness in the feet, making injuries harder to feel. Poor circulation slows the healing of cuts and blisters, which can lead to infection.

A minor foot injury, if not treated properly, can develop into a wound or serious infection. With proper foot care, you can keep these problems from happening.

Checklist for daily foot care

- Check your feet every day. Use a mirror to check the bottom of your feet and in between your toes. Look for blisters, cuts, sores, cracks, or anything else unusual.
  
  **Note:** If you can’t bend over far enough to hold the mirror to look at your feet, place the mirror on the floor and hold your foot over it or ask someone for help.

- Wash your feet with lukewarm water (less than 110°) and mild soap. Test the water with your hand or a thermometer to make sure it’s not too hot. Avoid soaking your feet. This can dry out your skin.

- Dry your feet well, especially between the toes. Moisture between your toes can lead to the growth of fungus. If your feet tend to sweat, dust them with mild foot powder after bathing.

- Get your nails trimmed regularly. Make sure they’re trimmed to the shape of your toes. Don’t rip off hangnails. If needed, use an emery board to file rough nail edges.

- Keep the skin on the bottoms and tops of your feet soft and supple with a moisturizing lotion, but don’t apply it between the toes.

- Put on soft, clean socks or stockings. Be sure they aren’t too big, too small, or too tight.
- Shoes should fit well, protect the whole foot, and have a wide toe box. They should not be tight or slip at the heel. Break new shoes in slowly. Wear them for no more than 30 minutes the first day you have them. Have more than one pair of shoes and wear one pair one day and the other pair the following day.

- Before putting shoes on, check them for wear and tear. Check the insides of your shoes for cracks, nails, pebbles, or anything else that can irritate the skin on your feet.

**Other helpful hints for taking care of your feet**

- Always wear shoes or slippers with solid soles that protect your feet. Don’t go barefoot or in stocking feet, even around house.

- Keep your legs uncrossed when you’re sitting.

- Don’t use commercial preparations to remove corns or calluses from your feet. Gently rub corns or calluses with a soft pumice stone to remove the build-up of dead skin. Be careful not to rub too hard. You can hurt the surrounding skin.

- Use warm, not hot water when bathing. Do not soak your feet or legs. Don’t use hot water bottles or heating pads.

- Don’t open blisters with a pin or needle.

- If you smoke, quit. It damages circulation.

- Stay physically active. Try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week to stimulate your circulation.

**Caring for injuries and wounds to your feet**

Treat cuts and blisters right away. If you have a deep injury to your foot, call your doctor or nurse.

- Wash the injured area with warm, soapy water.

- Don’t soak your feet.

- Don’t ever use Epsom salts or water that contains bleach.

- Cover the injury with a clean dressing.

- Don’t use tape on the sole of your foot,

- Make sure bandages are not tight.

- Check your wound to make sure it’s healing

You can’t rely on pain to tell you how serious your injury is. Call your doctor or nurse right away if you have redness, swelling, pus, or a wound that’s not healing.

Buy the supplies you need to care of your feet at your Kaiser Permanente pharmacy.