

Patient Education Sheet

Diabetes and Foot Care

What is meant by “foot care?”

“Foot care” reduces the risk of infection and amputation. It includes:

- Daily foot hygiene, including washing and moisturizing feet.
- Daily self-inspection of feet.
- Proper trimming of nails, often by a podiatrist.(foot doctor)
- Regular foot exams by your physician.

Why is foot care so important?

Diabetes increases the chance that you will have changes in the circulation and sensation/feeling in your feet. Decreased sensation, or loss of the “ouch” factor, can result in a cut or scrape going unnoticed, untreated and can set the stage for poor wound healing. Together, these changes can lead to serious infections that put your foot at risk for amputation.

What should I do to take care of my feet?

Foot care is a daily activity. Each day, you should:

- Examine your feet—tops, bottoms, sides, and between the toes. Use a non-breakable mirror if necessary to look at the bottom of your feet. Look for any cuts, scrapes, or cracks in the skin where an infection may begin.

- Feel the temperature of your feet—unusual coolness can signal changes in circulation; heat may indicate an infection.
- Look at the color of your feet—pale skin may be a clue that circulation is poor; redness may indicate infection.
- Keep your feet clean—wash them each day with soap and warm water. Dry your feet thoroughly, particularly between the toes.
- Rub lotion on your feet to prevent drying and cracking—the entire foot should be covered *except* between the toes.

Additional foot care habits to practice include:

- Never walk barefoot, even at home.
- Check the temperature of bath water with your elbow before stepping into the tub.
- Wear socks to bed if your feet are cold. Never use a hot water bottle or heating pad as you may burn your feet without realizing it.
- Wear well-fitting socks and shoes. Socks should not be tight around the ankle or calf. Always wear socks when in a shoe.
- Wet or damp socks should be removed as soon as possible.

- Shoes must be properly fitted. Have your feet measured each time you buy shoes.
- Feel the inside of your shoes with your hand before putting them on each day. Make sure there are no foreign objects, nail points or torn linings that could pierce or chafe your skin.
- Cut toenails straight across. If you have difficulty doing this, consult a podiatrist.
- Do not use chemical corn or callous removers. The acid in these will burn healthy skin and may lead to infection.
- DO NOT SMOKE

What will my physician do to help me care for my feet?

At each physician's visit, make sure you take off your shoes and socks so that your feet can be examined. Your physician will inspect your feet and will check the pulses in your feet and ankles. At least once a year, he or she will test for nerve changes using a tuning fork and a monofilament (a thin strand of metal or plastic that is gently pressed against the bottom of your feet). It is very important that you tell your physician about any changes in your feet that you have noticed since your last visit.

What should I do if I have a cut or scrape on my foot?

Wash the cut or scrape to clean the area. Your physician may want you to use an antibiotic ointment on the cut.

Put a small dressing on to protect the area. Have a "game plan" with your physician about reporting an injury if one occurs. Your physician may want to examine it or may tell you to continue to treat it at home and call back to report how it is healing.

Why is proper footwear important?

Properly fitting footwear (shoes and socks) protects feet from injuries that could lead to infections and amputations.

Select proper fitting footwear when buying shoes:

- ✓ Shop for shoes towards the end of the day. Feet often swell over the course of the day.
- ✓ Have both feet measured each time you buy shoes.
- ✓ Make sure the shoe is deep enough to accommodate the large toe joint, thickened toenails, hammer toes, bunions, etc., without rubbing. There should be ½ inch space beyond your longest toe when standing with the shoe on.
- ✓ Select a shoe that provides adequate foot support and protection. Avoid buying open-toed shoes or sandals.
- ✓ Shoe sizes may vary with style and manufacturer. Buy the shoe that fits, regardless of the size indicated on the box.

Will I need custom-made shoes?

Most people with diabetes do not need custom-made shoes. Off-the-shelf shoes, with or without inserts or orthotics, can be used. A small number of individuals need custom-made shoes which a specialist can help fit. Your physician will fill a prescription for special therapeutic shoes and will refer you to a shoe specialist if this is needed.

Does insurance pay for special footwear?

There is partial reimbursement available to those with diabetes who have Medicare Part B. To qualify, your physician must provide a note certifying that therapeutic shoes are needed. Medicare will reimburse 80% of the "allowable amount", that is, the price determined by Medicare. The reimbursement covers the following:

- One pair of depth shoes and three pairs of inserts per calendar year, *or*
- One pair of custom molded shoes (including inserts) and two additional pairs of inserts per year
- Separate inserts under certain situations
- Shoe modifications(alteration) as a substitute for an insert
- Custom molded shoes to accommodate a foot deformity.

Individuals with HMO Medicare or other insurances must check with the insurance carrier regarding coverage.

Sources:

American Diabetes Association @ www.diabetes.org

Pedorthic Footwear Association @ www.pedorthics.org