



10: CARING FOR DIABETIC FEET

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As we saw in factsheet 9, diabetics are at greater risk of foot ulcers than the general population because of circulation and sensitivity issues caused by their condition. Ageing presents an additional set of problems: the skin on your feet loses elasticity and becomes thinner, drier and more prone to age-related problems like corns, bunions and pressure spots, while toenails get brittle and more susceptible to fungal infections. Diabetic foot ulcers can develop quickly, be hard to heal and have serious consequences, so prevention is the best approach.

In the previous factsheet, we looked at important things you can do to manage your diabetes that will help prevent foot disease. Here are more simple steps you can take to keep your feet in good condition.

Regular inspections

Take a good look at the feet every day if you can. The best time to do this is after showering or bathing.

Wash your feet with a mild soap, rinse well and dry them gently but thoroughly. If it's hard for you to reach your feet, wrap gauze around a ruler to help you dry between your toes; a moist environment will encourage fungal infections and skin breaks. Don't use powder or cream between the toes (unless on the advice of a healthcare professional), and don't soak your feet in water unless advised to.

Moisturising the rest of your feet (avoiding between the toes) will help protect the skin from drying out and cracking. Check the heels well for hard skin or breaks that can become easily infected. Apply a balm containing 25% urea (a softening agent) to soften hard heels.

If you struggle to bend over or reach your feet, check your soles for wounds like cuts or blisters using a mirror on the floor or attached to a stick. Look out for red areas that might indicate badly fitting shoes. If you find anything, seek healthcare advice quickly. A podiatrist



THE WOUND WARNING SIGNS

- ✓ Hot and painful
- ✓ Smells bad
- ✓ Oozing thick yellow liquid
- ✓ 30+ days to heal



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Consumer education about chronic wounds by experts at the national peak body, Wounds Australia. Find more factsheets for consumers on our website.



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(foot specialist) can help treat calluses or corns before they become a serious problem. Find other sources of wound care advice in factsheet 6.

Trim your toenails regularly to avoid accidentally scratching yourself. The best time is after a shower when toenails are softer. If you can't reach your toes, a podiatrist can do this for you.

Wearing shoes that fit

One of the most important things you can do to prevent diabetic foot wounds is wear comfortable shoes that fit properly. Wear them inside and outside the house, and wear slippers at night.

Specially designed diabetic socks are free from dyes and points that create pressure, such as seams. Change your socks daily, check them for damage regularly, and replace them when necessary. Each day, check inside your shoes and socks to make sure there's nothing in there, such as tiny stones or twigs, that might damage your skin.

Buying the right shoe for you

Try on shoes in the afternoon because your feet may have swollen during the day. Choose footwear specifically designed for diabetics where possible, or closed-toed shoes with a cushioning insole and low heel. Opt for non-slip soles and a soft, flexible upper shoe.

Many people have one foot that is bigger than the other, so buy the shoes that fit the bigger foot. Ensure the ball of your foot fits comfortably in the widest part of the shoe and that there is space between the tips of your toes and the end of the shoe. Walk around in the store to make sure they are comfortable and don't slip up and down or rub your heels as you walk.

 In factsheet 11, we explore venous leg ulcers – a common chronic wound.



ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Good sources of advice about wounds include:

- Wound care clinicians
- GPs
- Nurses
- Pharmacists
- Podiatrists
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers
- Diabetes educators
- Some allied health professionals such as dietitians, occupational therapists and physiotherapists.



Find out more about healthcare professionals working with wounds in factsheet 6 on our website.

Care professional? Join Wounds Australia for events, guidelines, discounts and more:
woundsaustralia.org