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## *Ten Important Footsteps for Patients with Diabetes*

If you have diabetes, you probably know that you face special health challenges as the result of your disease. People with diabetes often suffer from poor blood circulation, which slows healing and may increase the risk of infections. Also, because of damaged nerves, many people with diabetes lose some of the sensations that make it possible to feel hot and cold, or the pain that might accompany an injury.

As you can imagine, complications like infection and injury can be particularly serious when they affect the feet. The good news is that by following these steps and taking care of your feet, you can greatly reduce your risk of having problems.

### **1. Check your feet.**

Perhaps most important of all these suggestions is this one: examine your feet closely every day to look for any changes and/or breaks in the skin. More precisely, what you are looking for in your feet is any redness, swelling, broken skin, sores, bleeding, pus-like discharge, pale or blue skin, noticeable changes in temperature, or any unusual feelings like tingling or numbness. You may need to use a hand mirror to examine the bottoms of your feet. If that's too difficult, either place a mirror on the floor to examine your feet, or have someone else check them for you.

Any of these changes could indicate the early stages of a potentially serious complication, so you can imagine how important it is to identify problems early and make an appointment to see your physician as soon as possible!

### **2. Keep your feet clean.**

**WASH YOUR FEET WITH SOAP AND WARM WATER EVERYDAY.** While this may sound like a lot of work, it's very important! And make sure the water is only warm - not hot - by checking it with your elbow. Don't check it with your hands or feet, because they may not feel the temperature differences enough. And be certain to dry your feet completely, including between the toes.

### **3. Go soft on your skin.**

According to the American Diabetes Association, as much as one third of the diabetic population suffers from dry skin on their legs and especially their feet. You may need to apply a moisturizer to your feet every day to keep them from becoming dry and cracked – because damaged skin can lead to very serious problems. And if your skin is extremely dry, you may require more specialized treatment. Just ask your doctor if such treatment is needed.

#### **4. Where your feet are concerned, avoid the heat.**

Do not use a heating pad or hot water bottle on your legs or feet for any reason.

#### **5. Listen to your doctor.**

Be sure to stay in contact with the health professionals who make up your diabetes care team. Never use any medication on your feet unless you talk to your doctor first. And always follow your doctor's instructions exactly.

#### **6. Let your clothes stay loose.**

If you have problems with your blood circulation (ask your doctor if you're not sure), avoid crossing your legs and stay away from garters, girdles, or other clothing that might restrict blood flow to your feet.

#### **7. Be careful with sharp instruments.**

DO NOT CUT CORNS OR CALLUSES OFF YOUR FEET! This invites infection – and people with diabetes need to avoid infections even more than the rest of the population. And while we're discussing sharp instruments, cut your toenails straight across and fairly short to avoid ingrown toenails.

#### **8. Maintain a proper weight.**

Lose weight if you need to, because not only will it help you control your diabetes, it will mean less pressure on your feet.

#### **9. Be kind to your feet.**

Before you put on your shoes, examine them to make sure that there are no pebbles or rough surfaces inside. And check your socks to avoid rough seams or mended areas. Everything should fit smoothly and comfortably.

#### **10. Kick the smoking habit.**

People with diabetes already face blood circulation problems due to their disease – and smoking makes things even worse. Quitting might just be one of the best health choices you'll ever make.

Of course, following these guidelines is no substitute for seeing your doctor on a regular basis, but diligently following these steps will be a big help to you and your doctor.