

DIABETES AND FOOT CARE

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is meant by “foot care”?

“Foot care” includes daily inspection and care of feet as well as regular foot exams by your physician to reduce the risk of infection and amputation.

Why is foot care so important?

Diabetes increases the chance that you will have changes in the circulation and sensation 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 – blanching 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.

What should I do to take care of my feet (continued)?

Additional foot care habits to practice include:

- Never walk barefoot, even at home.
- Check bath water temperature with your elbow before stepping into the water.
- 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.
- Shoes must be properly fitted. Have your feet measured each time you buy shoes.
- “Shake your shoes” 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 band-aid or dressing on to protect the area. Have a “game plan” with your physician about reporting a potential injury. Your physician may want to examine it or may tell you to continue to treat it at home and call back to report how well it is healing.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education

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