

Diabetes is a lifelong condition which can cause major foot problems. This leaflet will give you important advice on reducing the risks.

The risks of serious foot problems can be reduced by: -

- Good control of blood sugar
- Good control of blood pressure
- Good control of cholesterol levels
- Not smoking
- Protecting your feet by wearing good shoes
- Checking your feet regularly
- Most importantly, asking for help if you think something is wrong!

How diabetes can affect your feet

Loss of feeling

Diabetes can damage the nerves to your feet. This is known as 'neuropathy' and can cause numbness, loss of feeling, loss of pain sensation, tingling, pin and needles, burning sensation and shooting pains. If this happens then you may not feel blisters, cuts, a stone in your shoe, corns, callous, in-growing toenails, infections or an ulcer.

Circulatory problems

Diabetes may cause your arteries to narrow and harden. This is known as peripheral vascular disease (PVD). This will reduce the amount of blood getting to your feet. Pain may occur in the muscles of your legs when walking. Your skin may be more prone to injury and less able to heal. These problems will be made worse if you smoke.

Infections

If you have nerve damage or reduced circulation this may mean that an infection in your foot is more difficult to heal. Infections often upset blood sugar levels.

Foot deformity

Nerve damage may also affect the muscles leading to a change in the shape of your feet. This can cause high pressure areas on your feet resulting in corns and callous or even ulcers.

Footwear

- Walking barefoot or wearing sandals increases the risk of injury.
- It is important to wear shoes at all times.
- New shoes should only be worn for a few hours at first, you should then check for any areas of redness or blistering.
- If your feet swell take care to make sure your shoes do not become too tight.
- Cotton or woollen socks are best, not synthetic material

Ten Steps to Foot Health

1. Examine your feet daily for blisters, corns, callous, athlete's foot, nail problems or breaks in the skin. Use a mirror to check under your feet.
2. Wash your feet daily and dry well, especially between the toes. Do not soak your feet as this removes all the natural oils.
3. If your skin is dry, use a cream regularly. Ask your Podiatrist, GP or Pharmacist to recommend one for you.
4. Trim your nails regularly, following the natural curve of the toes.
5. Be very careful about walking barefoot, even indoors.
6. Avoid extremes of heat and cold.
7. Have shoes properly fitted at a good shoe shop. If you cannot find suitable shoes, you may be able to have them supplied from the hospital clinic – ask your GP or Podiatrist.
8. Check your shoes daily for stones, worn seams, loose insoles or holes which could injure your feet.

9. Be especially careful of your feet and choice of footwear on holiday, if playing sport or taking exercise. It is often new or different activities which cause damage.
10. Look after yourself – good blood sugar control, exercise, balanced diet and no smoking.

Annual Foot Screening

You should have your feet checked annually by a Podiatrist, GP, Practice Nurse or at the hospital diabetic clinic. The examination includes: -

- Assessing blood flow to your feet by checking your pulses at the ankles. In cases of doubt, extra tests will be carried out or requested.
- Checking for damage to the nerves to your feet and any loss of sensation. This is usually done by asking if you can feel the vibration of a tuning fork on your big toes, and a nylon filament pushed against the soles of your feet. You should report any odd sensations in your feet, such as numbness or pins and needles.
- Checking the structure of your feet for any abnormal pressure loadings.
- Seeing if your shoes are suitable.

The annual foot check is also an opportunity for you to ask about your feet and their care.

Please bring with you: -

1. Your blood sugar monitoring diary or diabetes record book.
2. Hospital issued shoes or the shoes you usually wear.
3. An up to date list of your medication.

Record here the date of your last annual check:-

Warning Signs

Warning signs of something being wrong with your feet include:-

- **Discharge of pus** from a corn, callous, a nail, a cut or injury.

- **Blister**, especially if it contains blood.
- **Cracks in the skin**, often found between the toes or on the heels.
- **Sudden swelling or pain** in your feet or legs, especially if there is no apparent reason.
- **Dark brown or black** discolouration in an area of callous.

If you have any of the above, seek help urgently from your Podiatrist, GP surgery or the hospital diabetic clinic.

Less urgent problems but still in need of attention include: -

- Toenails which are difficult to cut because they are growing too thick or in growing.
- Areas of callous or corns.
- Frequent discomfort or pain in your feet.
- Difficulty in finding shoes which are comfortable.

Contact Numbers

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**“This document is available in Welsh /
Mae’r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.**