



Foot Care in Diabetes

For DIABETES EDUCATION FORUM

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Foot Care in Diabetes

Diabetics, particularly those who are long standing and poorly controlled, are at increased risk to develop various foot complications such as infection, non-healing ulcers and gangrene, as compared to the general population.

Atherosclerotic peripheral vascular disease leading to poor blood supply in the lower limbs, Diabetic peripheral neuropathy leading to impaired sensation and increased susceptibility to infection are the main underlying factors, often operating together and responsible for increased prevalence of the above mentioned complications. In order to avoid these complications, diabetics should take meticulous care of his feet (like how a singer would take care of his throat or voice box, a young model would take care of her face or a jeweller would take care of an expensive diamond). Of course, it goes without saying that energetic and correct management of diabetic, the underlying disease is equally important.

If a diabetic neglects his feet, complications gradually set in, which could ultimately result in gangrene, requiring amputation. Prevalence of gangrene in the lower limbs is 17 times more common in diabetics as compared to non-diabetics.

In order to avoid these complications a diabetic should implement the following advice :

- 1) Wash the feet twice a day with mild soap and lukewarm (never hot) water.
- 2) Dry the feet gently with a soft towel especially between the toes.
- 3) If the skin is dry, apply a mild lubricant such as coconut oil, vaseline or cold cream to feet, daily before retiring.
- 4) Keep toe-nails neatly cut. Always cut straight across, do not cut close to the skin.

- 5) Inspect the feet daily for cuts, blisters, boils etc. Consult a doctor if required.
- 6) Never walk bare foot.
- 7) Never use a hot water bottle, as local sensation might be impaired.
- 8) In order to protect the toes, broad, soft canvas or leather shoes should be used (avoid chappals or sandals).
- 9) Gradually break into new shoes by wearing them for a short time only to start with. Always buy new shoes in evening.
- 10) Use cotton socks only. Do not use socks having tight elastic on it as it will hamper circulation in the legs.
- 11) Inspect the shoes for things like stones, nails etc.
- 12) Do not cut corns and callouses yourself. Consult your doctor.
- 13) Do not apply strong chemicals to your feet.
- 14) Take regular exercise, it improves blood circulation. Put your feet up when you are sitting. Move your toes up and down for five minutes 2-3 times a day. Also move your feet up, down and inside-outside at ankle joint in similar manner.
- 15) Avoid tobacco in any form.

What to do if the wound / infection / blisters / foot swelling does not reduce on elevation of the foot ?

Do the following :

Clean the wound with dilute Savlon / Dettol. Cover the wound with sterile gauze after applying a antibiotic ointment (Ensamycin). Check the blood sugar. Do not wet the affected foot. Use plastic bag to cover the foot. Contact your doctor immediately. Do not walk with weight bearing on the affected foot.

Diabetic Foot Surgery

What care should a diabetic patient take after surgery for the foot problem ?

Do not bear pressure on the affected foot. This may lead to loss of leg.

Do not wet the affected foot.

Cover the dressing with the plastic bag to prevent insects / flies getting attracted to the dressing.

Do the dressing daily using sterile dressing material as per your doctor's instructions.

Do not apply cotton directly on the wound.

Maintain proper diet and blood sugar control.

Use crutches / walker to walk till the wound heals.

Do not start bearing pressure on the affected foot without your doctor's permission.

Use the current footwear after the wound heals.