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Trauma - Anne Leadbeater OAM & Dr Rob Gordon

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Diabetes - foot care

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Summary

- Diabetes can reduce blood circulation and damage the nerves to the feet.
- Ask your doctor to examine your feet regularly for any evidence of nerve damage or poor circulation.
- Foot problems can be avoided if you take care of your feet and act quickly if you have a problem.

Foot problems can be avoided if you take care of your feet and act quickly when you have a problem. Get your feet checked at least once a year by a doctor or podiatrist to detect problems early and help prevent complications.

Circulation in people with diabetes

Poor blood circulation can affect the blood supply to your feet. When this is reduced, cuts and sores may not heal. An early sign of poor circulation to the feet may be pain or cramps in the backs of your legs when walking.

Circulation problems can be caused by hardening or narrowing of arteries as they become clogged up. Common causes include:

- smoking
- high blood fats
- raised blood glucose levels.

How to improve circulation for people with diabetes

Suggestions to improve your blood circulation include:

- Control your blood fat levels.
- Keep blood glucose levels as close to normal as possible.
- Don’t smoke. Smoking causes spasm and narrowing of blood vessels. Smokers have more heart attacks, strokes and circulation problems than non-smokers.
- Exercise daily. A brisk walk will help keep the blood flowing around your body.

Foot care for people with diabetes

All people with diabetes should have their feet checked at least once a year by a doctor or podiatrist. This is important to detect problems early and to prevent ulcers and other complications. You may have heard it said that diabetes causes gangrene (dead, black tissue). Most cases of gangrene result from delayed treatment of foot injuries.

Daily foot care
Suggestions to help prevent foot problems in people with diabetes who suffer from neuropathy or vascular disease include:

- Check your feet daily for signs of swelling, redness or heat – these may be signs of infection.
- Wash your feet daily and dry well between the toes.
- Use methylated spirits if there is a lot of moisture between your toes.
- Moisturise dry skin, especially cracked heels (for example, with sorbolene cream) but not between the toes.

**When buying new shoes**

Suggestions include:

- Don’t be rushed into buying shoes that you aren’t completely happy with.
- Avoid open-toed shoes and narrow toes.
- Have your feet measured and try on the shoes to check they are long enough, wide enough and deep enough.

**Nerve supply to the feet**

Nerves are the ‘wiring’ of the body. They carry messages (feelings) to your brain from the rest of your body. The nerves to your feet are the most likely to be affected by diabetes.

Damaged nerves (neuropathy) can cause painful, numb or insensitive feet. Minor cuts, blisters or burns may not be felt and ulcers can develop, which you may not be aware of. Some people with neuropathy experience uncomfortable sensations such as burning, tingling and pain. This is often worse at night.

It is important to remember that many people with nerve damage have no symptoms and are unaware of the problem. Nevertheless, they are still at risk of developing ulcers.

**How to avoid injury to feet with damaged nerves**

Suggestions include:

- Never go barefoot.
- Wear appropriate shoes to protect your feet.
- Avoid injury by wearing well-fitting, protective shoes – do not wear open-toed shoes.
- Keep toenails trimmed. Cut toenails along the shape of the toe and file rough edges.
- Have corns or calluses treated by a podiatrist.
- Check the temperature of your bath water with your elbow before stepping into the bath.
- Be careful not to put your feet too close to radiant heaters.
- Every six months, check for signs and symptoms that may indicate you have a problem. These may include reduced circulation or sensations, abnormal foot structure or poor hygiene.

**See a podiatrist**

Podiatrists are experts in looking after feet and lower limbs. They are highly trained health professionals who deal with the prevention, diagnosis and management of foot problems. You don’t need a referral to seek advice or treatment from a podiatrist, however, a referral from your doctor under a team care arrangement (TCA) can assist in covering the fee for this service.

If you have circulation problems or reduced feeling in your feet:

- See a podiatrist at least once each year.
- Do not attempt to treat corns and calluses yourself.

**When to see your doctor**

See your doctor if:

- you develop pain, throbbing, heat, swelling or discolouration in your feet
- a cut or injury becomes red or does not heal.

**Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Local podiatrist
- Local community health centre
- Diabetes educator
- Diabetes Australia Victoria Tel. 13 RISK (13 7475)
Things to remember

- Diabetes can reduce blood circulation and damage the nerves to the feet.
- Ask your doctor to examine your feet regularly for any evidence of nerve damage or poor circulation.
- Foot problems can be avoided if you take care of your feet and act quickly if you have a problem.

References

- Foot complications in diabetes, Baker IDI Heart & Diabetes Institute, More information here.
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More information

Diabetes

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Diabetes basics
  - 10 tips to help prevent type 2 diabetes
  - Diabetes
    - Diabetes and the build-up of glucose (sugar) in the blood can cause serious complications if left untreated
  - Diabetes and insulin
    - It may take a while to find the right insulin dose to reduce your blood glucose to acceptable levels
  - Exercise and diabetes (video)
    - Healthy exercise is important for everyone. This video from Diabetes Australia – Victoria explores the importance of exercise when you have diabetes
  - Health check
    - This health assessment questionnaire will identify which zones of your lifestyle are contributing to your personal health risk and provide actions you can take to make positive change
  - Managing my diabetes (video)
    - This video from Diabetes Australia – Victoria explores managing your diabetes
  - My feet and diabetes (video)
    - When you have diabetes you need to take care of your feet every day. This video from Diabetes Australia – Victoria explores footcare and diabetes
  - Type 2 Diabetes - Pre Diabetes (video)
    - For some people with a family history of type 2 diabetes, diagnosis in later life doesn’t come as a surprise. Others can go for years without realising that they are living with the condition

- Types of diabetes
  - Diabetes - gestational
    - Gestational diabetes is diabetes that occurs during pregnancy and usually disappears when the pregnancy is over
  - Diabetes insipidus
    - Diabetes insipidus is characterised by extreme thirst and the passing of vast amounts of urine
  - Diabetes - pre-diabetes
    - Pre-diabetes has no symptoms or warning signs, and is a risk factor for developing type 2 diabetes
  - Diabetes type 1
    - Type 1 diabetes can affect anyone of any age, but is more common in people under 30 years
  - Diabetes type 2
Type 2 diabetes may be prevented, but it cannot be cured...

- Managing my diabetes (video)
  This video from Diabetes Australia – Victoria explores managing your diabetes...

- Type 2 Diabetes - Pre Diabetes (video)
  For some people with a family history of type 2 diabetes, diagnosis in later life doesn’t come as a surprise. Others can go for years without realising that they are living with the condition...

Living with diabetes

- Diabetes and exercise
  Exercise is an important lifestyle choice for everyone. For people with diabetes or at risk of diabetes, exercise is still an important part of a healthy lifestyle...

- Diabetes and healthy eating
  Healthy eating for people with diabetes is no different than for everyone else...

- Diabetes and healthy eating (video)
  Healthy eating is important for everyone. This video from Diabetes Australia – Victoria explores healthy eating and food choices...

- Diabetes and oral health
  People with poorly controlled diabetes have a higher risk of tooth and gum problems...

- Diabetes - foot care
  Good foot care and regular check-ups can help people with diabetes avoid foot problems...

- Diabetes - issues for children and teenagers
  Many parents worry when their child with diabetes starts or returns to school...

- Diabetes - long-term effects
  The risk of most diabetes-related complications can be reduced...

- Exercise and diabetes (video)
  Healthy exercise is important for everyone. This video from Diabetes Australia – Victoria explores the importance of exercise when you have diabetes...

- Getting active - tucker talk tips
  The main thing is to choose physical activities that you enjoy and that you can stick to in the long term...

- Managing my diabetes (video)
  This video from Diabetes Australia – Victoria explores managing your diabetes...

Complications with diabetes

- Blood pressure (high) - hypertension
  Hypertension, or high blood pressure, can increase your risk of heart attack, kidney failure and stroke...

- Diabetes and erectile dysfunction
  Men with diabetes are more prone to problems with erectile dysfunction or impotence...

- Diabetes and kidney failure
  Kidney failure means the kidneys can no longer remove waste and maintain the level of fluid and salts that the body needs...

- Diabetic coma
  Diabetic coma is a medical emergency and needs prompt medical treatment...

- Diabetic neuropathy
  Diabetes is the most common cause of neuropathy...

- Diabetic retinopathy
  Without treatment, diabetic retinopathy can cause loss of vision and blindness...

- Heart disease - know your risk
Risk factors for heart disease include smoking, diabetes, obesity, family history and age.

- **Hyperglycaemia**
  Hyperglycaemia means too much glucose is circulating in the blood.

- **Hypoglycaemia**
  Hypoglycaemia refers to symptoms caused by low blood glucose. The most common reason for hypoglycaemia is diabetes medication.

- **Kidney failure**
  You can lose up to 90 per cent of kidney function before you even feel sick.

**Related Information**

- **Diabetes and insulin**
  It may take a while to find the right insulin dose to reduce your blood glucose to acceptable levels.

- **Diabetes - long-term effects**
  The risk of most diabetes-related complications can be reduced.

- **Diabetes and oral health**
  People with poorly controlled diabetes have a higher risk of tooth and gum problems.

- **Diabetes and healthy eating**
  Healthy eating for people with diabetes is no different than for everyone else.

- **Diabetes - issues for children and teenagers**
  Many parents worry when their child with diabetes starts or returns to school.

**Home**

**Related information on other websites**

- Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute.
- Diabetes Australia.
- Life! Taking Action on Diabetes.

**Support Groups**

- Diabetes Australia - Victoria

**Content Partner**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by: Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute

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