

## Diabetes Foot Care

**D**iabetes is a disease in which blood glucose (sugar) levels are above normal. Over time, these high glucose levels can damage nerves and blood vessels, causing various health complications, many of which affect the legs and feet.

Foot complications associated with diabetes may vary, but if left untreated, even ordinary problems can get worse and lead to serious health problems. Nerve damage, poor blood flow, and changes in the shape of your feet or toes can all affect foot health. However, there are many preventative measures you can take now so that foot complications do not have to negatively impact your daily life.

### Diabetic foot complications include:

- **Neuropathy (nyoo-ROP-uh-thee).** Diabetic nerve damage can lessen your ability to feel pain, heat, and cold.
- **Skin changes.** Your feet may become dry, because the nerves that control the oil and moisture in your feet may no longer work.
- **Calluses.** Thick buildup of skin under high-pressure areas of the foot can break down and turn into ulcers (open sores).
- **Foot ulcers.** These open sores most often occur on the ball of the foot or under the big toe. Neglecting an ulcer can result in infection, which in turn can lead to loss of a limb.
- **Poor circulation.** Diabetes causes blood vessels of the foot and leg to narrow and harden, making your foot less able to fight infection and to heal.
- **Amputation.** Patients with diabetes who have artery disease or who are smokers are the most likely to undergo amputation of the toe, foot, or leg.

### How can I avoid the problem?

Your health care provider will perform a thorough foot examination at your annual visit. Between

these annual examinations you should regularly check your feet for any noticeable changes, taking care to also examine the underside of your feet for changes that might otherwise go unnoticed. What might seem minor could become a serious complication if you do not take care of the problem early. To avoid more serious complications, it is critical to maintain foot health by doing the following:

- **Check your feet daily** for any changes, using a mirror to see the underside of your feet.
- **Moisturize feet** with a thin coat of plain petroleum jelly or unscented hand or foot cream. Do not put oil or cream between your toes, because the extra moisture can lead to infection.
- **Clean your feet daily**, but avoid soaking your feet, because that can lead to excessive dryness.
- **Trim your toenails** straight across when they get long, and ask for assistance from your health care provider if you cannot do this on your own.
- **Do not remove calluses and corns with chemical agents;** instead gently smooth them with a pumice stone, or let your health care provider cut or trim them for you.
- **Don't smoke**, because smoking slows blood circulation that is vital for maintaining foot health.
- **Maintain your target blood glucose levels** by following your health care provider's advice and taking all prescribed medications.
- **Plan an exercise routine** with your health care provider to maintain healthy circulation of blood through your legs and feet.
- **Never walk barefoot**, and make sure the linings of your socks and shoes are smooth and nonabrasive.
- **Avoid extreme hot and cold temperatures.**

