

Looking after your feet

Diabetes can increase the risk of developing problems with your feet. You can reduce this risk if you have regular foot checks with a health professional and take good care of your feet.

What does a foot check involve?

A foot check is done by a health professional, usually a doctor, podiatrist or diabetes educator. The health professional will examine your feet for any current problems and decide how likely you are to develop a foot problem in the future. To do this, they will:

- » look at the condition of your toe nails, the skin on your feet and the shape of your feet
- » feel the pulses in your feet to check the circulation (blood flow)
- » check the nerves in your feet, usually by touching the soles of your feet with a thread of nylon (monofilament), and
- » check your shoes to make sure they are the best fit for your feet.



What is your risk of developing a foot problem?

You have LOW-risk feet if you:

- » have pulses in your feet
- » do not have any nerve damage
- » do not have any changes in the skin or shape of your feet.

You have HIGH-risk feet if you have any of the following:

- » no pulses in your feet
- » nerve damage
- » changes in the shape of your feet
- » a foot ulcer or amputation.

Taking good care of your feet

Check your feet daily

Get to know your feet and check them every day. If you have trouble reaching your feet, use a mirror or ask a family member or carer to help.

Check all areas of your feet, especially the soles and between the toes, and look for:

- » dry skin or excessive moisture
- » thickened skin, such as calluses or corns
- » breaks in the skin, such as cracks, blisters or ulcers
- » signs of infection, including redness or darker skin than usual
- » any change in the shape and thickness of your nails, and any in-grown nails
- » any change in the shape of your feet, such as bunions or claw toes.

Take care of your skin

Wash your feet every day. Be sure to dry all areas thoroughly, especially between the toes. Apply moisturiser every day but not between the toes, as this area needs to be kept dry to reduce fungal infections.

Avoid using over-the-counter corn cures as they can cause ulcers in people with diabetes.

Look after your nails

Cut your nails straight across and gently file any sharp edges. Cutting down into the corners can cause in-grown nails. You may need to ask someone to help if you can't reach your feet.

Wear the right footwear

It's important to choose your footwear carefully. Make sure your shoes fit well so they don't rub against your feet.

Fastening devices (such as laces or Velcro™) and enclosed heels can help to secure your feet in your shoes. Choose a heel height of less than 2cm and wear seamless and well-fitting socks or stockings with your shoes.

Replace your shoes when they become worn out.

What if you have HIGH-risk feet?

Take extra care

Always wear shoes, whether you are inside or outside your home. If you have nerve damage, you could have an injury that you cannot feel.

Always check inside your shoes before wearing them in case there is something that could injure your foot.

To avoid burns, keep heat packs or hot water bottles away from your feet. Make sure your heater is at least one metre away from your feet. If your feet are cold, wear shoes and layers of socks instead.

See a podiatrist

If you have HIGH-risk feet, it's important to regularly see a podiatrist.

Ask your general practitioner (GP) if you are eligible for a Medicare rebate to see a podiatrist. Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Gold Card holders are entitled to free podiatry services from private podiatrists. If you have private health insurance, check whether you can get a rebate for podiatry services.

Wear prescribed footwear

If you have HIGH-risk feet, your health professional may recommend prescribed footwear and insoles. It's important to wear these correctly for the best results.

Having health professional foot checks

If you have LOW-risk feet, have your feet checked at least once a year.

If you have HIGH-risk feet, have your feet checked at least every three to six months.

See a health professional earlier if you notice any changes in your feet.

When do you need to seek help urgently?

See a health professional URGENTLY if there is:

- » any sign of infection
- » skin breakdown, such as an ulcer or a crack
- » new pain, swelling or redness (especially if you have nerve damage).

The NDSS and you

A wide range of services and support is available through the NDSS to help you manage your diabetes. This includes information on diabetes management through the NDSS Helpline and website. The products, services and education programs available can help you stay on top of your diabetes.

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