

# Getting to Know Your Feet

## Diabetes



Diabetes is a chronic disease affecting millions of Americans. Diabetes is the 6th leading cause of death in Kentucky and the number one cause of disability. Diabetes is also the number one cause of non-traumatic amputation of the lower legs.

Diabetes can lead to damage to the nerves and blood vessels in your feet and legs which can lead to the inability to heal properly. A common blister can become life threatening to someone with diabetes. Learning the early warning signs of impending trouble will help prevent complications that can lead to amputation.

Seeing a podiatrist (doctor who specializes in foot and ankle disease treatment and prevention) on a yearly basis or more often if you are having problems will help prevent long-term complications as well

Since delayed wound healing is a common problem in people with diabetes, even simple blisters or cuts can lead to ulcerations. Ulcers are one of the most common diabetic conditions of the feet. These must be treated by a health care provider to prevent further complications that can lead to infection and possible amputation.

Examine your feet daily for any of the following changes and notify your health care provider at once. Do not treat these with home remedies. Your health care provider will give the necessary treatment to prevent complications.

*Early warning signs of impending complications may include:*

- Change in skin color of your feet.
- Change in skin temperature of your feet, such as an increase or decrease in the warmth of your skin.
- Unusual swelling in the feet. Ingrown toenails.
- Fungal infections of the toenails or foot. Bleeding from corns, calluses, or blisters. Dry or cracked skin around the heels.

*Tips for Maintaining Good Foot Health If You Have Diabetes:*

- Examine your feet and toes daily. Look for cuts, blisters, corns, calluses, or scrapes. Also check for color or temperature changes and any swelling or signs of infection in those areas.
- Wash your feet twice a day (morning and night) with a mild soap and lukewarm water.
- This will also be a good time to examine your feet. Dry them well. Lose weight.
- Take part in daily physical activity.
- Wear thick, soft socks. This will help cushion your feet and prevent blisters, corns and calluses. Stop smoking. This will help increase the blood flow to the feet and legs. Cut toenails straight across. This will help prevent ingrown toenails.
- Buy good fitting shoes. Make sure you are measured when buying new shoes to ensure a good, proper fit.
- See your podiatrist annually.
- Do not go barefoot. You may injure your feet. Diabetes can lead to decreased sensation in the feet. An injury may go unnoticed until it becomes infected. This can lead to complications.
- Do not wear heels, sandals, or shoes with pointed toes. These shoes can lead to pressure areas on the feet which can cause calluses or blisters.
- Do not drink alcohol in excess. Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to increased neuropathy or nerve damage.
- Do not wear anything too tight around the feet or legs. This can lead to decreased circulation in those areas which may lead to a decreased ability to heal.

**Adapted** for use in Kentucky from the **American Podiatrist Medical Association (2008). Diabetes: Startling Statistics.** Available online at [http://www.apma.org/s\\_doc.asp?CID=371&DID=17537](http://www.apma.org/s_doc.asp?CID=371&DID=17537).

This is a publication in an eight-part series on **Getting to Know Your Feet**. Other publications in this series are:

- Overview: HSW-PAR.820
- Common Foot Ailments: HSW-PAR.821
- Aging Feet: HSW-PAR.822
- Arthritis: HSW-PAR.823
- Injuries: HSW-PAR.825
- Information for Women: HSW-PAR.826
- Walking for Health: HSW-PAR.827

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