

# Your feet and diabetes



## Why should I care about foot problems?

Taking care of your feet is very important for people with diabetes. Not doing so can lead to many serious health problems, including amputation in severe cases. That's why you should try to prevent problems before they arise. Diabetes can cause 2 different problems in your feet:

- **Nerve damage**

The nerves in your legs and feet can be damaged by high blood sugar. This may affect your ability to feel pain, heat, or cold in your legs and feet. You may also have odd feelings or numbness. This nerve damage can lead to a sore or an infection, which may get worse because you don't know it's there.

- **Poor blood flow**

When too little blood reaches your legs and feet, it's hard for a sore or infection to heal.

## What are the signs of nerve damage in my feet?

You may feel tingling, pain, or numbness in your feet.

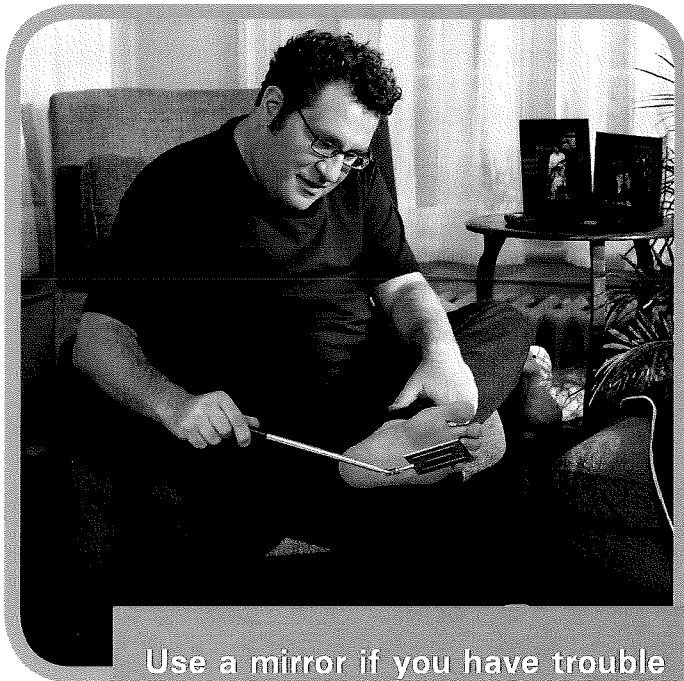
Contact your health care provider right away if you have cuts or breaks in the skin of your foot, a change in the color or shape of your foot, pain or numbness, or an ingrown toenail. Even athlete's foot, blisters, and plantar warts can become infected.

Have your health care provider look at your feet at every visit. More than half of amputations related to diabetes can be prevented with regular checkups.

## How can I protect my feet?

### Keep your feet clean and protected

- Wash your feet every day, and dry them carefully, especially between the toes
- Don't go barefoot and always wear clean socks and comfortable shoes that protect your feet
- To keep the skin soft and smooth, rub a thin coat of lotion on your feet every day, but not between your toes
- Ask your health care provider about insurance coverage for special protective shoes
- Avoid getting your feet really hot or really cold (even hot bath water isn't good for them); don't use heating pads, hot water bottles, or electric blankets
- Have your health care provider trim any corns or calluses on your feet



Use a mirror if you have trouble seeing the bottoms of your feet.

### Check your feet for wounds and infections

- Check your feet every day for scratches, cracks, cuts, blisters, sores, and infection (use a mirror if you have trouble seeing the soles of your feet)

### Keep the blood flowing to your legs and feet

- Don't sit with one leg crossed over the other
- When you're able to, prop your feet up while sitting
- Wiggle your toes and flex your ankles by moving your feet for about 5 minutes 2 to 3 times every day
- Don't smoke—smoking can make poor blood flow problems worse

### Talk to your health care provider

Have your health care provider look at your feet at every visit. Other things you can do to help prevent foot problems or keep them from getting worse include controlling your blood sugar and being more active. Remember to speak to your health care provider before starting an exercise program.