

How to Prevent Diabetic Foot Ulcers

Foot ulcers are the leading cause of lower-extremity amputation. Yet regular foot exams and some simple self-care tips can prevent open sores and wounds from becoming life- and limb-threatening.

If you have diabetes, it is critical that you **have regular foot exams**, at least every six months, by your doctor or a foot health professional, such as a podiatrist. A foot exam can reveal a lesion that hasn't healed or may be infected. You may not feel pain, but that doesn't mean you're not at risk. Any foot infection, untreated, increases the risk of amputation.

Also do **daily foot inspections yourself**. Look and feel for bumps, lumps, blisters or bruises; cuts, sores or cracked skin; patches of thin or shiny skin, which can signal lack of blood flow; tingling or numbness; ingrown toenails with red, puffy skin along the nail and tenderness or pain. See a health professional to treat any of these conditions.

Follow these additional tips to keep your feet healthy and free of sores and infections:

- **Wash your feet** every day with lukewarm water, making sure to dry them thoroughly, especially between and under toes; athlete's foot or other fungal infections can occur in moist areas.
- **Trim your toenails** regularly or have a foot health professional do it for you.
- **Don't cut or file calluses** or other protrusions on your feet and don't use wart removers or other harsh chemicals.
- **Make sure new shoes** are properly measured and fitted—don't wear shoes that are too loose or too tight.
- **Check inside shoes** daily for sharp points, sharp edges, seams or other rough areas or foreign objects that may lead to cuts, wounds or abrasions.
- **Wear padded socks**, without seams or with thin, flat seams, made of acrylic or acrylic blends to protect feet and keep moisture away.
- **Walk as much as possible** to boost blood flow to the feet and help with weight and blood sugar control.
- **See a podiatrist** or other foot health professional immediately if you notice any signs of infection.

- *Lori S. Weisenfeld, DPM*

Clinical Instructor of Orthopaedics, Mount Sinai Medical Center

Vice Chair, Gramercy Surgery Center Medical Advisory Board

Member, Institute for Preventive Foot Health Scientific Advisory Board