



**KAISER PERMANENTE®**

## Foot Care for Diabetics

Diabetes may lead to hardening of the arteries and cause nerve damage in the feet. This means that injuries will heal more slowly, and there will be an increased risk for infection. It also means that diabetics' feet are less sensitive to heat, cold, and pain.

If you're diabetic, this decreased sensitivity may keep you from being aware of minor pain or foot injuries. Therefore, you'll need to prevent even small injuries and you'll need to be careful to keep small injuries from becoming serious.

First of all, protect your feet by wearing leather shoes that are soft-soled, broad-toed, and well-fitted. Your shoes should not fit too tightly. Leave about half an inch of room at the toes, and break in a new pair of shoes gradually. Wear them only half an hour the first day, then increase the amount of time that you wear them for one hour per day. Don't wear sandals or go barefoot outdoors. However, you might want to give your feet a daily rest period indoors, without wearing shoes.

It's also important that you try to maintain good circulation in your legs, as well as your feet. Don't wear garters or panty girdles, and avoid sitting with your legs crossed.

If your feet get cold at night, wear bed socks. Never use a hot water bottle or heating pad. You may burn your feet without knowing it.

To care for your feet, wash them daily with soap and lukewarm water. Test the water temperature with your wrist or elbow, not with a toe. Thoroughly blot your feet dry, especially between the toes. Relieve dry skin by using a lanolin-based skin lotion, but don't apply the lotion between the toes. Keep your feet dry by dusting them lightly with cornstarch or an antifungal powder. You'll also want to change your socks whenever they get sweaty. If your toenails are dry and brittle, soak them in warm water once or twice a week; then apply a lanolin-based lotion generously under and around the toenails but, again, not between the toes.

Care of the toenails is critical. Cut them only after a bath or shower when your feet are very clean and the toenails are soft. Always cut the nails straight across so as to guard against ingrown toenails.

If your toes are close together and overlap, keep them separate with lamb's wool, to prevent rubbing and irritation. If you have corns and calluses, soak your feet in lukewarm, soapy water. Then gently rub off the dead skin around the corn or callus with gauze, a towel, an emery board, or a pumice stone. Do not cut or tear off the dead skin. Also, do not use potent medicines such as corn plasters, Mercurchrome, or iodine on corns or calluses.

While washing and drying your feet, inspect them for cuts and scrapes. And look for any reddened, bluish, or whitish areas. If these areas do not disappear when you rub them gently, contact your health care professional immediately.

Don't use Mercurochrome or iodine on cuts and scrapes either. Instead, wash the area with soap and water. Cover the injury with an antibiotic ointment and gauze secured with porous tape. Do not use band-aids. Check the injury daily. If it doesn't start to heal within two days, call your health care professional. Also—as a general rule—whenever you notice any pain, redness, or swelling in your feet, call your health care professional



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at [www.kaiserpermanente.org/california](http://www.kaiserpermanente.org/california), then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION