

Locala Podiatry Service

At high risk? How to protect your feet and prevent serious problems from diabetes

Why is diabetes a risk to your feet?

Diabetes is a long-term condition that can cause serious problems for your feet, and in some cases, may lead to amputation. This is because diabetes can damage:

- The nerves in your feet (called peripheral neuropathy) – this can change how your feet feel.
- The blood flow to your feet (called ischaemia) – this can affect how well your feet feel.

These changes often happen slowly and you may not notice them at first.

What does a 'high risk foot' mean?

Your foot check has shown that you are at high risk of developing wounds that may be slow to heal or may not heal at all. These types of wounds can lead to serious complications, including amputation.

Your podiatrist will tell you if you have any of the following risk factors:

- Hard skin (callus) on your feet
- Changes to the shape of your foot or toes
- You are unable to look after your feet, or you don't have help
- You are having dialysis (renal replacement therapy)
- Reduced feeling in your feet
- Poor blood flow to your feet

You should now be referred to a specialist podiatrist for further assessment and a treatment plan.



If you notice any of these problems, get help quickly

It's very important to get medical advice within 24 hours if you notice any of the following:

- A toe or foot that becomes red, hot or swollen
- A new wound or break in the skin
- Redness or unusual colour changes in your foot or toe
- New or unexplained pain in your foot

Contact your Foot Care Team, local Podiatry Department, or your GP straight away.
If you can't reach them, go to your nearest A&E department.

Delays in getting help can lead to serious complications, so don't wait.

Why is this so important?

Foot wounds in people with diabetes can lead to:

- Heart attacks
- Strokes
- Amputations of the foot or leg
- Early death

Taking care of your health can reduce these risks. You can help by:

- Managing your diabetes, cholesterol, and blood pressure
- Stopping smoking
- Exercising regularly
- Maintaining a healthy weight

If you have a family history of heart problems, your risk may be even higher.

What should I do if I have a foot wound?

If you get a wound and it's not showing signs of healing within 24 hours, and your foot care team, GP or podiatry service are not available, go to A&E immediately.

How can I protect my feet?

Check your feet every day and look for:

- Blisters
- Breaks in the skin
- Redness, swelling, heat
- Pain

If you find any damage, cover it with a clean dressing. Don't burst blisters. If needed, ask a partner or carer for help. Use a 25% urea cream daily on dry or cracked skin.

Wear the right shoes

Badly fitting shoes can cause wounds. Your podiatrist may:

- Give you advice on suitable footwear
- Recommend prescription shoes or insoles if needed

Keep your skin healthy

- Wash feet daily in warm water and mild soap.
- Do not soak your feet.
- Dry thoroughly, especially between toes.
- Check water temperature with your elbow or ask someone to test it – you may not feel if it's too hot.
- Use moisturiser on dry skin – but not between the toes.

Care for your toenails

Only cut your nails if your podiatrist says it's safe for you to do so.

Socks, stockings and tights

- Change them daily
- Avoid tight tops or thick seams

Never walk barefoot

You could easily injure your feet without noticing.

Always check your shoes

- Look inside and underneath before putting them on
- Remove any small stones or sharp objects

If you wear prescription shoes

- Only wear the shoes and insoles provided
- Follow the advice from your podiatrist or orthotist
- Do not remove insoles unless told to

Prescription footwear helps reduce your risk of ulcers, but it cannot remove the risk entirely.

Hard skin and corns

Do not try to remove them yourself.

Do not use corn plasters or over-the-counter treatments. These can be dangerous if you have diabetes and may cause new wounds.

Avoid extreme temperatures

- Wear socks if your feet are cold
- Never warm your feet near fires or radiators
- Don't use hot water bottles or heating pads in bed

Have you had a foot ulcer or amputation before?

If you get a wound and it's not showing signs of healing within 24 hours, and your foot care team, GP or podiatry service are not available, go to A&E immediately.

Go to all your podiatry and diabetes care appointments. This helps to catch problems early and avoid serious complications.

If you have a concern about your feet

- Contact your Foot Protection Team, podiatry service, or GP straight away.
- If no one is available and the problem is urgent, go to A&E.

Delaying treatment could lead to serious complications.