



Lifesaving Tips About ... Foot Care and PAD

Why Is Foot Care Important for People with PAD?

People who have **peripheral artery disease (PAD)** are more likely to have foot problems. This is because plaque narrows and blocks the arteries, which causes blood flow to slow. As a result, the muscles and tissues in your legs and feet are not getting enough oxygen and nutrients. Cuts and bruises on your legs and feet will not heal as fast as they should. Minor foot injuries in people with PAD and people with diabetes can cause sores or ulcers to turn into serious infections.

PAD, Diabetes, and Foot Care

Foot care is important for people who have PAD and diabetes. If not managed well, diabetes can cause poor blood flow or circulation to feet and legs. Some people who have diabetes can also develop **diabetic neuropathy**. This means nerve damage from

high blood sugar levels may cause someone to lose feeling in their feet. When someone has neuropathy, they may not be able to feel blisters or sores. Untreated sores (ulcers) on the legs and feet can lead to serious problems like amputations.

What Can I Do Each Day to Take Care of My Feet?

Every day look at the tops, bottoms, and sides of your feet and inspect between your toes. Use a mirror or ask a family member or friend to help if you have trouble seeing. Use your hands to feel for hot or cold spots, bumps or dry skin, and numbness. Check for:

- Sores, cuts, bruises, or breaks in the skin
- Rashes
- Corns, calluses, and blisters
- Red spots and swelling
- Ingrown toenails and toenail infections
- Pain

If you find anything wrong with your feet, call your health care provider right away, especially if you have diabetes. Don't try to take care of cuts, sores, or infections

yourself. Some over-the-counter foot care products can harm your skin and may make problems worse.

Ask your health care provider if the following foot care plan is right for you.

Foot Care Plan:

- **Wash your feet each day.** Use warm (not hot) water and a mild soap or cleanser. Dry your feet gently and well. Be sure to dry between the toes.
- **Keep the skin soft and smooth.** If your skin is dry, apply a thin coat of cream or lotion over the tops and bottoms of your feet, but not between your toes. Make sure the cream or lotion does not have alcohol in it.
- **Trim your toenails straight across and file the edges.** Rounded edges help prevent ingrown toenails that can cause infections. If your nails are thick or hard to trim, *go to a health care provider to trim your toenails.* Ask your health care team to refer you to a foot care provider, or a **podiatrist**. This is someone who takes care of people with diabetes or people with circulation problems in their feet or legs.

For more information, review these related flyers:

- Focus on Walking
- Lifesaving Tips About ... Managing Diabetes and PAD
- What Is Peripheral Artery Disease?

What Other Steps Should I Take to Care for My Feet?

Washing and checking your feet each day is the first part of your foot care plan. Follow these additional steps to protect your feet from serious problems.

Always Protect Your Feet

Bare feet increase your risk for injury.

Speak with your provider about the best choice of socks and shoes for your needs. As a rule:

- **Choose socks that don't have bumps or ridges.** They should be seamless socks or those with flat or soft seams.
- **Check your shoes before putting them on.** Feel inside them to make sure the lining is smooth. There should be no pebbles or rough edges.
Remember: If you have neuropathy, you may not be able to count on the nerves in your feet to feel something wrong with your shoes or socks.
- **Keep your feet warm.** Cold weather causes your blood vessels to narrow and restrict blood flow to your lower extremities.

Choose Footwear That Will Keep Your Feet Safe

When examining your current footwear or when buying new shoes, have a shoe expert make sure the size is right. Feet often get wider as we get older, therefore shoe sizes change over time.

- It is important to make sure that your shoes are not too loose or too tight.

- To avoid getting blisters or sores from new shoes, break them in. Wear them for only a few hours a day at first and then change into other shoes for the rest of the day.
- If your health care team suggests wearing special inserts in your shoes, it's important to make sure they do not make your shoes fit too tight.
- Ask your health care team whether your insurance covers special insoles or footwear before purchasing them on your own.

Keep the Blood Flowing to Your Feet

Blood carries important nutrients and oxygen to your muscles and tissues. To help blood flow to your feet and legs:

- When sitting, elevate your feet. Don't cross your legs for a long period of time.
- Nicotine reduces blood flow to your feet because it causes your blood vessels to narrow. If you smoke or use any type of tobacco products, talk with your health care provider about steps to quit smoking.
- Ask your health care team to help you plan a daily activity program that is right for you. Walking, dancing,

swimming, and bicycling are good forms of exercise that are easy on the feet. Daily activities can help increase blood flow to your legs. Avoid activities that are hard on the feet, such as running and jumping. And make sure to start each activity with a warm-up.

Special Notes for People with PAD and Diabetes

If you have diabetes and PAD, your health care provider should check your feet at every office visit. Once you are in the exam room, take off your shoes and socks so that you are ready to have your feet checked.

If you have diabetes, you should have a complete foot exam at least once a year, or more often if you already have foot problems. A complete foot exam should check:

- The skin on your feet
- Your foot muscles and bones
- How well you can walk
- Your blood circulation
- Any numbness in your feet

Questions for Your Doctor



It is important to work closely with your health care provider about your diagnosis and treatment. You can bring this form with you to help talk to your medical provider about any questions and concerns you may have.

