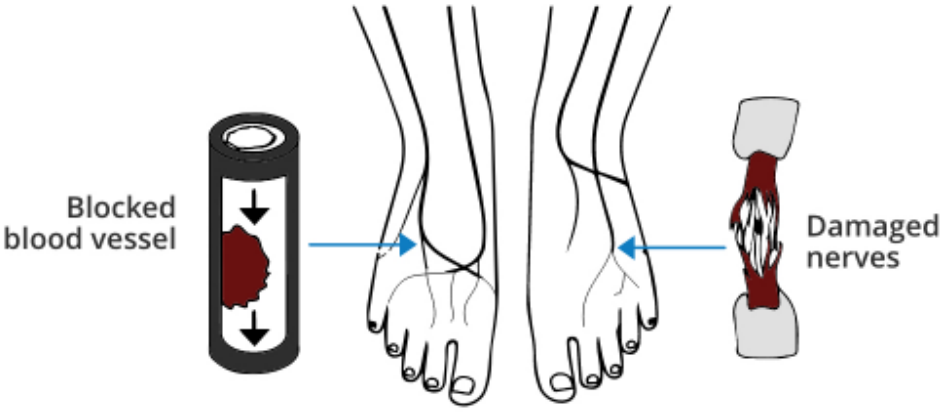
DIABETIC FOOT DISEASE
WHAT IS IT AND HOW DO I MANAGE IT?

This PIL educates patients about diabetic foot and provides guidelines on how to take special care of their feet. It encourages patients to stop smoking and to maintain good glucose and blood pressure control.

How does diabetes affect my feet?

Over time, having diabetes can damage the feeling (sensation) in your feet. This is known as peripheral neuropathy and it may mean that you don't notice when you get a cut or sore on your foot.

Blood flow (circulation) to your feet can also be affected by diabetes: cuts or sores might not heal as well as they would in a person without diabetes. High blood glucose levels can also increase the risk of wounds becoming infected.



It's important to look after your feet very carefully: if you don't treat problems when they first appear, they can lead to foot ulcers, infections and even amputations.

When should I contact my doctor?

Some signs that you should see your healthcare practitioner are:

- Tingling sensation or pins and needles (like numbness), pain (burning) or a dull ache in your feet
- Shiny, smooth skin on your feet or hair loss on your legs and feet
- Loss of feeling in your legs or wounds and sores that don't heal
- Feet that are swollen or don't sweat
- Cramp in your calves when resting or walking

You should contact your doctor urgently if you notice:

- Breaks in the skin of your foot or liquid seeping from a wound
- Skin on all or part of your foot that has changed colour (more red, blue, pale or dark)
- Extra swelling where there was a blister or injury
- Redness or swelling around an ulcer
- Redness or swelling in an area where you have previously been warned to seek immediate attention

What can I do to keep my feet healthy?

- **If you smoke, ask for help to stop.**
  Smoking affects your blood flow and can result in problems that lead to amputation
- **Manage your blood glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure.**
  Staying within the target range will help prevent damage and can stop things getting worse.
- **Keep active.**
  This will help you manage your diabetes, reducing your risk of serious complications.
- **Eat a healthy, balanced diet.**
- **Check your feet every day**
  (if you can't lift your feet, use a mirror to see your soles, and if you can't see clearly, ask someone to help). Look for cuts, colour changes and swelling, hard skin, scars and scabs. Check between your toes and that your toenails are not digging into your flesh.

Tip: Watch the demonstration video on Diabetes UK's website

- **Wash and dry your feet every day.**
  Use soap in warm (not hot) water. Test the temperature using a thermometer or your elbow, not your feet. Don't soak your feet – this dries out the skin.
- **Smooth corns and calluses gently.**
  These patches of thick, dry skin occur more often and build up more quicky in people with diabetes. Don't use blades or chemical agents; rather very carefully use a pumice stone to smooth the skin (available from most pharmacies). Speak to a podiatrist (foot doctor) if you need help with corns or other problems.
- **Take care when cutting your nails.**
  Trim them straight across – don't cut down the side and don't clean your nails using the point of scissors.
- **Always wear shoes and socks.**
  Don't walk barefoot or in just socks – even when you are indoors. You might not notice if you hurt your foot.
- **Protect your feet from hot and cold.**
  Wear sunscreen on the tops of your feet and keep your feet away from open fires and heaters. Don't put a hot water bottle or heating pad on them; rather wear socks in bed. Wear lined waterproof boots if going out in wet weather.
- **Keep the blood flowing to your feet.**
  If sitting down, try to put your feet up. Wiggle your toes and move your ankles up and down, in and out, throughout the day. Don't wear tight socks or elastic stockings and don't use rubber bands to keep loose socks up.
- **Have a foot check at every healthcare visit.**
- **Make sure your socks and shoes aren't too tight and don't rub**.
  Choose flat or low-heeled shoes that are broad fitting (with more room available for the feet) and have a deep, rounded toe area so your toes don't get squashed up against the edge of the shoe. Laces or buckles will stop your feet sliding around.
- **Use moisturising cream every day.**
  Talk to your healthcare practitioner or pharmacist about a suitable emollient cream to keep your skin healthy.

Treating diabetic foot problems

Problem	Problem
Foot ulcer	A foot ulcer is an open wound or sore on the skin that's slow to heal. Ulcers occur most often on the ball of the foot or on the bottom of the big toe. You should see a doctor for any ulcer so they can decide what to do in each case. They may do x-rays, clear out any dead and infected tissue and take a sample of the wound to see what antibiotics you should take for it. You'll need to keep off your foot for a while. NHS Scotland have a foot ulcer care guide which may be helpful.
Gangrene	Sometimes a wound infection in the feet can lead to gangrene, a serious condition in which body tissue in that area starts to die. If you develop gangrene, you may need to have surgery to remove the damaged tissue and to take antibiotics to treat infection. If gangrene gets really bad, your toe or foot may have to be amputated.
Charcot's foot	Charcot's foot is a rare condition in which, over time, nerve damage from diabetes can lead to changes in the shape of the foot. The bones in the foot become fragile and break or dislocate in response to very minor things – even standing or walking. Charcot's foot may start with redness, warmth, and swelling. It's treated by taking weight off the foot and wearing a plaster cast to allow the foot to set and heal in the correct position.

How can friends and family help?

Your family can help you with your daily foot checks, especially if you struggle to see your feet or to lift them up.

Stay positive! Although reading about what can happen may seem overwhelming, remember that the serious consequences of foot problems are mostly preventable with good blood glucose control and good foot care.

Where can I find out more? | Websites

- Diabetes South Africa website and Facebook page
- Podiatry association of South Africa
- Diabetes UK pages on foot problems
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases pages on feet

Helplines/support groups :

- Diabetes SA: 086 111 3913
- Diabetes SA's list of local support groups