

DIABETES & FEET:

What can you
do about
them today?



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INTRODUCTION

Diabetes is a serious condition that can affect your entire body. It's associated with increased blood sugar levels and reduced blood flow. When left untreated, diabetes can also cause damage to your nerves.

It's important to understand diabetes because if complications arise — such as an untreated sore on your foot — it can affect your quality of life. You're more at risk of foot problems if you have diabetes, however you can lower your chances of having diabetes-related foot problems by taking care of your feet every day.

In this guide, we explore symptoms of diabetes-related foot problems and how to treat them, as well as practical ways to keep your feet healthy.

TYPES OF DIABETIC FOOT PROBLEMS

NERVE DAMAGE

If you're not managing your blood sugar levels well, this can cause nerve damage to your feet.

The symptoms of nerve damage include:

- numbness in feet
- cold feet that don't warm up easily
- a tingling, pins and needles sensation in the feet, or
- burning pains in the feet, usually more noticeable in bed at night.

These symptoms are a result of the loss of some or all of the feeling in the feet. This loss in sensation increases the chances of injuring your feet too, because you don't feel any pain. An injury to your foot can develop into an ulcer on the bottom of your foot, which in the worst instances can penetrate into and develop into a chronic infection in your bones and joints.

POOR BLOOD SUPPLY

If your blood sugar levels are too high, this can reduce the supply of blood to your feet. This makes people with diabetes more likely to get an infection if there are any injuries that break their skin. The signs of a poor blood supply include:

- sharp leg cramps after you walk a short distance or up stairs
- cramps in your legs particularly at night, which can only be relieved by getting up and walking around
- cold feet, and
- purple or blue discolouration of the whole foot, especially in your toes.

OTHER SIGNS OF DIABETIC-FOOT PROBLEMS TO WATCH OUT FOR:

- dry cracked feet
- any exposed cuts and abrasions that are taking too long to heal
- ulcers
- thickened, yellowed, discoloured nails, and
- small, itchy swellings on your toes that occur as a reaction to cold (also called chilblains).

You're more at risk of serious foot problems if:

- your blood sugar levels have been too high for a long time
- you smoke. Smoking also reduces the blood flow to your feet, which makes wounds heal more slowly, and
- you are inactive.



HOW TO PREVENT DIABETIC FOOT PROBLEMS



It's important to check your feet every day for blisters, calluses, corns, cracked skin and anything that doesn't look right. Make sure you check in between your toes and around your heels.

- Wash your feet every day and carefully dry them, especially between your toes.
- Trim your toenails by gently following the curve of your toes.
- Protect your feet by always wearing something on your feet.
- In summer, this could be a pair of sandals, as long as the soles of your feet are protected from stepping on sharp objects.

- Use socks and stockings that don't have a rough seam.
- Choose shoes made from natural fibres such as canvas, leather or suede; wear socks made from a blend of natural and synthetic fibres, to help 'wick' moisture away from your feet.
- If you find an injury such as a cut or blister, wash it in salty water and cover the injury with a sterile dressing, available from pharmacies.
- Get a foot check at every health care visit.



HOW WE TREAT YOUR FEET

At Capital Podiatry, we have treated hundreds of patients with diabetes. We can help you with advice and with hands-on treatment. We can help you understand how diabetes affects your feet and help you be sure that you're doing the best for them.

When you come in the clinic, we will:

- assess the overall appearance of your feet, and discuss any obvious risk factors such as corns, ingrowing nails or wounds
- give you advice about the best way to care for your feet
- assess the quality of the blood flow in your legs and feet
- assess how much feeling you have in your feet using special equipment
- determine your risk of developing complications such as ulcers
- carefully trim and file your nails, treat any wounds, remove any corns and smooth away any calluses and rough areas on your feet
- send a report to your doctor if there are any areas of concern.

