

# Chapter 13: Caring for Feet, Skin and Teeth

## Caring for Your Feet

### Tip

Remember to take your shoes and socks off at each diabetes visit with your health care provider. This will remind you that you need to have your feet looked at regularly.

Good personal care can prevent problems caused by diabetes. Daily attention and regular exams are important. You need to take extra care of your feet and legs. High blood glucose can cause damage to the nerves and blood vessels in your feet and lower legs. When nerves are damaged, you don't feel problems like sores or cuts on your feet.

Amputations caused by diabetes could be reduced by as much as 75 percent with good self-care and regular foot exams by your health care provider.

- Look at your feet every day to check for sores, cuts, cracks or blisters.
- Use a hand mirror (or ask a family member) to check the bottoms of your feet.
- Wash your feet with slightly warm water every day.
- Do not soak your feet because this will dry them out and might cause problems like cracking.
- Always check inside shoes for worn areas or objects that could cause a sore on your foot. New shoes should be broken in slowly. Ask your health care provider if you need special shoes.
- Use lotion or cream for dry skin but do not use it between your toes.
- Cut toenails straight across and smooth out sharp edges.
- Ask your health care provider or nurse to examine your feet at every checkup.
- Wear proper shoes and socks even when indoors.
- Protect your feet from hot or cold. Don't use heating pads or hot water bottles on your feet.
- Do not use tobacco. It decreases the blood flow to your feet. Poor blood flow means slower healing and greater chance of infection.

# Caring for Your Skin and Teeth

People with diabetes need to be extra careful in taking care of their skin and teeth. Diabetes can cause problems with how the blood flows, how infections heal and how nerves are able to carry signals to various parts of the body. Regular care can help prevent these problems.

## Tip

Think of your skin as a glove that protects your feet and other parts of your body. Cracks in this “glove” allow germs and dirt to enter the body and cause problems.

## Caring for your skin

- Bathe or shower every day using mild soap and slightly warm water.
- Use lotion or cream for dry skin but do not use it between your toes.
- Use sunscreen whenever you are in the sun.
- Call your health care provider if a cut, sore or open wound is healing slowly.
- Talk to your health care provider about any other skin problems such as extreme itching or dryness.
- Protect your skin by wearing gloves when you do work that may injure your hands.
- Dress warmly in cold weather to prevent frostbite.

## Caring for your teeth

You may have more problems with your teeth and gums if you have high blood glucose.

- Remind your dentist at each visit that you have diabetes.
- Brush at least 2 times a day and always before you go to sleep.
- Floss each day to help remove plaque from between your teeth.
- Get your teeth cleaned and checked by a dentist every 6 months.
- Don't use tobacco. This decreases blood flow and causes gum problems.