

## Teach Back: Foot Care

Ask: “Why is it important to prevent damage to the feet in a person with diabetes?” Allow several responses. Clarify concepts.

Foot damage can be prevented. Foot problems are caused by a combination of vascular and nerve problems.

As mentioned earlier, damaged nerves do not transmit sensations correctly. For that reason, the most serious problems are ingrown nails, ulcers, or wounds that do not heal and get infected.

### How does foot gangrene develop in a person with diabetes?

The combination of vascular problems, nervous problems and some abnormalities in the feet, such as bone deformities like bunions, increase the risk of ulcers in the feet. If an ulcer or any wound is not treated on time, it can become infected, and it may be very hard to treat with available antibiotics. Often, ulcers do not heal easily since the arteries in the legs providing the blood supply to the feet may be damaged from diabetes. If the infection worsens, it can spread to bone or cause gangrene (death of tissue). A person may then require removal of the dead tissue or an amputation to control the infection. Gangrene may cause death. That is why it is so important to pay attention to the feet and to take care so as to avoid complications.

### Group Activity: **Taking care of my Feet** Duration: 15 minutes

#### **Purpose:**

Demonstrate appropriate foot care to prevent infections and amputations.

#### **Steps to follow:**

1. Use the foot model and the foot care kit. If possible, prepare a box or a bag with the necessary supplies for each participant.





2. Using the foot model, show how to examine the foot for wounds and scratches.
3. Recommend seeing a podiatrist immediately if they see or smell anything suspicious or if they discover infections, color changes, different temperatures on the skin (hot or cold areas) or small deformities.
4. Show how to wash the feet every day, examining each toe one by one on every side, and show how to dry them carefully.
5. Show how to file down the toenails.
6. Show them the white cotton socks they should wear.
7. Show the recommended kinds of shoes that provide protection. Discourage walking barefoot.
8. Ask the participants to ask questions. Add any other pertinent recommendations.

### **How does a person with diabetes take care of their feet?**

The following are important recommendations for all persons with diabetes:

- Control glucose levels and follow all self-care recommendations.
- Do not smoke.
- Check feet daily, inspecting the foot soles, between the toes, and each toe one by one. Use a mirror or ask a family member to help check the feet.
- Wash feet with warm water every day for no more than 5 minutes. Dry them carefully. Do not use any talcum powder between the toes.
- Use cotton socks without elastic bands to avoid cutting off circulation.
- In the winter, protect the feet from extreme cold or freezing. If the person has peripheral neuropathy, they may not feel the cold or notice that their feet are freezing.
- Never cut the toenails. Instead file them. Do not harm the skin in the corners of the nails.
- Use comfortable and cushioned shoes to avoid irritations, calluses or deformities.
- Avoid sandals that will expose the feet to bruises and bumps. Also avoid high heels that will increase pressure in certain areas.
- Never walk barefoot, particularly on the beach or in swimming pools.
- Check feet with the doctor to rule out peripheral neuropathy and reduction of blood flow to the feet.
- See a podiatrist (foot doctor) especially, if experiencing infections (sore, cut, ulcer, fungus), changes in color or temperature, ingrown toenails or deformities (hammertoe, bunion, callus, etc.).

If a person with diabetes also had peripheral neuropathy, add the following recommendations:

- Review the feet twice a day, in the morning and before going to bed.
- See the podiatrist at least once a year.
- Ask the podiatrist to treat calluses, ingrown nails, and other lesions in the feet, even if they seem minor.
- Ask the podiatrist if special shoes or insoles will be necessary.
- Consult the doctor about any small bruise or wound in any area of the foot.

These recommendations are even more important for persons that already have ulcers or amputations because they have higher risk, and their foot care should be stricter.

## **6. SKIN CARE**

Diabetes also affects the skin. Some of the signs are:

- Dry skin
- Excess sweat
- Ulcers
- Spots
- Itching
- Infections
- Fungus

### **What should we do to protect the skin?**

The following are recommendations for protecting the skin:

- Avoid the sun. Use sun block, hats, and clothes with sleeves and turtlenecks.
- Avoid burns when cooking or washing.
- Use comfortable clothing and change sweaty clothes.
- Use lotion for dry skin areas.
- Drink lots of water.
- Treat infections immediately
- Take precautions to avoid ulcerations if bedridden for too long. Change body positions regularly.
- Pay attention to the hygiene of the genital area. This is an area very prone fungus infection, particularly in women. Skin fungi are a sign of uncontrolled diabetes. Consult the doctor at the first sign of an infection in the genital area.
- Avoid tobacco, and if you smoke, quit smoking.