How does diabetes affect your feet?

Diabetes related foot ulcers

You have been assessed as having a foot ulcer, which is an open wound that will require some time to heal. About two to ten per cent of people with diabetes will experience a foot ulcer, which requires intensive treatment.

Diabetes is a long-term condition that requires constant management. It can cause foot problems because of damage to blood supply and nerves, particularly in your feet. The altered feeling in your feet is called ‘peripheral neuropathy’. Reduced blood supply in your feet is called ‘ischaemia’.

These changes occur silently and so gradually that you may not notice them occurring. This is why you are advised to have a podiatrist do a complete foot screening at three month intervals. It is likely that your podiatrist will see you regularly, for routine care as well as ulcer care appointments.

There are other events related to diabetes that you need to be aware of. Some people with lack of feeling (neuropathy) can develop foot complications where the joints and bones become disorganised or the foot arches collapse. The first sign of this is a hot and swollen foot. This condition needs immediate medical care.

Infections and ulcers:

People with diabetes are more vulnerable to foot infections. Having an open ulcer on your foot, or wet dressings gives the bacteria an opportunity to cause infection. Most people with diabetes and a foot ulcer will require antibiotics at some point. Your podiatrist will be checking at appointments for infection into deeper tissues. This may require probing for depth in the ulcer and/or taking an x-ray of your foot.

Prescription shoes and orthotics:

Prescription shoes and orthotics are commonly used for pressure off-loading, your podiatrist will be able to offer advice on appropriate footwear to protect your feet.

It is likely that your podiatrist will discuss the manufacture of insoles or shoes made for you to reduce pressure on vulnerable areas on your feet. These need to be worn regularly to be effective and are part of your overall care.

Surgery related to foot ulcers:

- If your ulcer travels deep in your foot, it may require deep tissue debridement. This is performed by a surgeon and requires special post-operative care.
- If delayed healing of your foot wound is caused by reduced circulation in your legs, you may be a candidate for vascular surgery. Your podiatrist can take some early screening tests, to help establish the need for this intervention.
- If infection is severe or circulation is severely compromised in a toe, foot or leg, amputation may be required to save the remaining healthy, viable tissue.
- Most amputations can be prevented with good care and management. Don’t hesitate to ask questions of your healthcare team if you’re unsure about anything.

Things to do:

- Wear protective footwear inside and outside the house at all times.
- Purchase shoes in the afternoon if your feet are swollen. Always check inside shoes with your hand for rough or broken linings or objects before wearing them.
- Check your shoes and feet daily for areas that have become rubbed, the skin will be red when you remove your shoes.
- Take care when washing feet with soap and water. Check the temperature of the water with your hand or elbow if your feet have lost sensation. Take care to wash in-between the toes.
- Do not soak your feet, as this could lead to infections.
- If your skin is dry, apply a moisturiser daily to protect your skin from unnecessary cracks.
**Things to avoid:**

- Avoid shoes that can damage your feet. This includes tight shoes that can rub your skin and open footwear such as sandals that might leave your feet susceptible to injury.
- Never use corn plasters and acid solutions on your skin.
- If you smoke, you are strongly advised to stop. Seek help from your general practitioner or pharmacist. Try the Quit line: [www.quitnow.gov.au](http://www.quitnow.gov.au) or phone 13 78 48

It is likely that your podiatrist will look after your nail care now that you are high risk.

**Personal advice:**

Should you experience any signs of foot infection seek medical help immediately. These signs include:

- redness around a wound or cut
- new pain after an injury
- unusual swelling in your feet or legs.

**Your next podiatry appointment:**

You are advised to have your next complete foot assessment in ____ months. This will be due on ________________.

If you require any further information or assistance, please contact QUT Health Clinics on **07 3138 9777**.