How does diabetes affect your feet?

**High risk foot**

You have been assessed as having a ‘high risk’ of developing further diabetes related foot complications such as ulcers, infections or amputations.

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. *Your foot screening and assessment today has shown that you have a high risk of developing foot ulcers.* It is likely that your podiatrist will see you regularly, often at monthly or six weekly appointments.

**High risk feet:**

There are a number of reasons for being allocated to a high risk category:

- You have had a previous ulceration or amputation and/or
- You have two or more risk factors (neuropathy, peripheral arterial disease or bony feet).

Your assessment has indicated you have current foot ulcers and will continue to be a high risk of developing ulcers in the future. There are some vulnerable or high pressure areas on your feet as a result of deformity that will need professional care. Due to the heightened risk of ulcerating, you will need to take extra care of them.

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.

People with diabetes are also more vulnerable to foot infections. These infections will often need antibiotics, so it’s very important to seek medical care early.

**Regular care:**

- Callouses and corns should only be treated by a podiatrist.
- Infections develop more easily with diabetes, and if combined with reduced blood flow these can escalate to a more serious problem quickly.
- Check your feet every day for any signs of change such as redness or swelling.
- If your skin on your feet is dry, apply a moisturiser such as Sorbolene, or a urea based cream if the skin is extra hard and calloused.

**Prescription shoes and orthotics:**

Your podiatrist will be able to offer advice on appropriate footwear to protect your feet. It is likely that they 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.

**Things to do:**

- Wear protective footwear inside and outside 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.
- Check your feet daily for changes such as cuts, blisters, bruises or colour changes, swelling or open sores. Report them to your healthcare professional (podiatrist, nurse, doctor) without delay.
**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 all 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.