How does diabetes affect your feet?

Low risk foot

You have been assessed as having a ‘low risk’ of developing diabetes related foot complications, such as ulcers and infections.

To keep your feet healthy requires good blood flow and nerve supply. The blood vessels provide energy to working muscles and aid in healing. The nerves send messages to and from the brain in response to stimuli. These stimuli enable the foot to distinguish between sensations of hot and cold, sharp and blunt, vibration, pain and pressure.

Sometimes over a period of time, diabetes may affect this healthy system. The blood vessels become narrowed reducing blood supply to the feet. This is known as peripheral arterial disease. The nerves may not relay messages back to the brain which is known as ‘peripheral neuropathy’.

These changes occur silently and so gradually that you may not notice them. This is why you are advised to have a podiatrist do a complete foot screening at least once a year. Infections develop more easily with diabetes, and if combined with reduced blood flow can escalate to a more serious problem quickly.

Low risk feet:

Your foot screening has shown that you do not have nerve or blood vessel damage at present, as such you have been categorised as having a low risk of developing foot complications due to your diabetes.

Controlling your diabetes, cholesterol and blood pressure, in addition to having your feet screened every year by a suitably trained professional, will help to reduce the risk of developing problems with your feet and to keep your feet healthy.

Regular care:

As your feet are in good condition, you may not need regular podiatry treatment. However, should you require regular nail care or callous debridement or other care, a podiatrist is the person to help with these safely.

If you follow the simple advice in this flyer, you should be able to carry out your own foot care, unless you develop a specific problem. Perform daily foot inspections and seek advice should new signs or symptoms develop.

Things to do:

- Check your feet daily for changes such as cuts, blisters, bruises or colour changes, swelling or open sores. Report any changes to your healthcare professional (podiatrist, nurse, doctor) without delay.
- Use a mirror to see the soles of your feet, or have someone else take a look at your feet daily.
- Take care when washing your feet with soap and water, with particular care between the toes.
- Do not soak your feet, as this could lead to infections.
- Dry feet carefully, especially between the toes.
- If the 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.
Things to avoid:

- Avoid shoes that can damage your feet. This includes tight shoes that rub your skin red and unprotective footwear such as thongs/flip-flops.
- 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 or phone 13 78 48

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.