Diabetic foot care - why it is so important
Over a long period of time high blood glucose levels can cause damage to the nerves in your body, especially the longest ones that go down to reach your feet. Nerve damage (neuropathy) can affect your sensory, motor and autonomic nerves. Sensory damage means you will be less able to feel pain, temperature and vibrations. Motor damage can cause the joints and bones in your feet to change shape and autonomic nerve damage will make your skin very dry. High blood glucose levels can also damage your blood supply.

What signs to look out for
Change to your nerves will produce:
- Tingling or pins and needles
- Numbness
- Pain
- Sweating less
- Your feet looking red and feeling hot to the touch
- Changes in the shape of your feet – the arch of your foot can drop and your toes can start to curl under
- Hard skin
- Losing a sense of the position of your feet and legs in relation to the rest of you

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1. How can diabetes damage my feet?
2. What is neuropathy?
3. What does damage to the sensory nerves lead to?
4. What other damage can high blood glucose cause?
5. Name two symptoms of changes to your nerves you should look out for
6. Name two symptoms that changes to your blood supply can produce
7. What changes to my feet should I check for?
8. What can I do to prevent foot problems?
9. Why is preventing foot problems important?
10. What should you do when you are on holiday?
Changes to your blood supply will produce:

- Cramp in your calves
- Shiny, smooth skin
- Losing hair on your feet and legs
- Thickened toenails
- Cold pale feet
- Change in the colour of the skin on your feet
- Wounds or sores
- Pain in your feet

Checking your feet for changes

You should check your feet for any damage such as cuts, blisters, burns or hard skin daily. The areas you must keep a close eye on, are the balls of your feet, any areas where your bones might stick out, places on your feet where your shoes or socks might rub. Preventing foot problems in the future, is about being positive and active now rather than acting only when there is a problem. Firstly, you must manage your diabetes well, leading a healthy lifestyle and keeping your blood glucose levels well controlled. It is also important to take care of your feet everyday by:

- Developing your own daily foot care routine of washing and moisturising your feet
- Checking them for injuries and changes to your skin.
- Wearing the right shoes and socks and never going barefoot
- Getting nail or skin problems treated quickly and looking after your toe nails
- Act quickly if you see problems starting.

Why is preventing foot problems important

Usually when you damage your skin it heals quickly but if you have diabetes it does not and this can cause an ulcer which takes a long time to heal. Ulcers start as a break in the skin which gets worse instead of better. If the wound becomes infected the skin may be swollen and there may be some fluid coming from it. If it is not treated quickly it could lead to amputation, though this rare.

Special precautions for holiday times

It is important to care of your feet when you are on holiday:

- If you are travelling for a long time keep your legs and feet moving to stop your feet swelling
- Pack your usual moisturiser
- Take shoes you have worn before
- If you are going on a beach holiday pack shoes you can wear on the beach or in the sea.
- Pack a small first aid kit to treat any small injuries
- Keep up your daily foot routine
- Wear shoes all the time to stop damage to your feet
- If you injure your feet get help straight away.

For more advice on this or any health-related subject, speak to one of our trained team.