



Taking Care of Your Feet

By Cynthia Bagnall

As we get older, it becomes harder to see and reach our feet; they can often be ignored. Everyone can benefit from having proper foot care, even if you do not currently have any complications. Certain conditions, such as diabetes or poor blood flow can make you more susceptible to issues with your feet. Other conditions, such as a foot injury or undergoing chemotherapy, among many other things, can also result in neuropathy, which might manifest as a loss of feeling or pain in the feet.

Having a foot care kit at home is recommended. This kit should contain nail clippers, or nippers (easier if you have thicker nails), a nail file, lotion, and an unbreakable mirror so you can see the bottoms of your feet.

Wash your feet daily in warm water with mild soap. Soaking your feet is unnecessary as it can actually dry your skin and strip the skin's natural oils. Dry well between toes as too much moisture leads to problems. If you have difficulties reaching your feet to dry them, try wrapping a washcloth on a spatula or running a soft brush between your toes.

Check your feet daily for cuts, blisters, and wounds. The earlier you notice a problem, the better the outcome will be. Do not cut nails too short and make sure to file any sharp corners. Do not cut corns or calluses with scissors or a razor at home – there is a risk of creating wounds, which can become infected. If your feet are sweaty, use an antifungal foot powder to prevent skin breakdown, especially between the toes.

Lotion on your feet is good, but not between your toes. If you have really dry/cracked/callused skin then a lotion with urea is beneficial to help exfoliate or break down and shed the dead skin cells. Use a lotion you have at home or even olive oil or Vaseline works well if that is all you have.

Diabetes socks are great for everyone. They stretch while not cutting into the skin and are breathable. If you find the seams of your socks are rubbing your toes, try turning your socks inside out. White socks are best as any discharge from an undetected wound will be easier to notice.

At home, while sitting down, wiggle your toes to get the circulation going. Note that smoking will decrease circulation and impair healing if you do have a foot wound.

Shoes are important as they prevent injury if you experience loss of sensation. Consider the three dimension of your shoes – length, width and depth. Depth of the shoe is especially important if you have

overlapping toes or hammer toes. Have your feet measured for shoes with every purchase and shop at the end of the day as your feet swell. Pointed shoes and high heel shoes may promote bunions, hammer toes, and ingrown nails, and should be avoided. Get professionally fitted if at all possible and buy what you can afford. Shoes should feel snug but not too tight – you should be able to wiggle your toes. Test-drive your new shoes indoors and wear them around house for 20 minutes, then check your feet to ensure that no blisters or pressure points are developing. Breathable material such as leather is better, as are Velcro or shoelaces which can provide more room for adjustment. Wear water shoes in public areas such as poolside and locker rooms to prevent fungus infections, which can be easily transmitted in these environments. Wear footwear while inside and outside to provide support and protection. If you have neuropathy, you may not feel when you are stepping on something.

If you have diabetes or neuropathy, we suggest having a foot assessment and a monofilament test to be done at least yearly. Book an appointment with your health care provider or if you do not have one, you can access a walk-in clinic for this assessment. Ask your provider if foot care services are provided as part of their services. If you do not have access to free foot care, try to save up for a private foot care nurse appointment or ask for foot care as a gift. At the foot care appointment, ask the nurse how to properly care for your feet and bring a family member or friend to help you remember.

If you have any foot problems involve your health care provider or foot care specialist as the sooner problems are addressed, there is less risk of wounds, infections, and amputations.

Cynthia Bagnall is foot care nurse the NorWest Community Health Centres. Cynthia has her Diabetes Education certificate and Foot Care Educators Course.

If you are rostered with a primary care provider at the NorWest Community Health Centres, or with the Aurora Family Health Clinic, the Port Arthur Health Centre, or the Superior Family Health Organization where we offer Team Care services, you may be eligible for free foot care.