

FACT SHEET:

Looking after your feet

Looking after your feet is very important when you have diabetes. People with diabetes are more likely to develop problems with their feet. You can reduce the risk by managing your diabetes and taking good care of your feet, having regular foot checks and timely treatment by a health professional. Foot problems cause less damage when detected and treated early.

What is your risk of developing a foot problem?

You have **very low-risk** feet if you:

- do not have any nerve damage in your feet
- have normal blood flow in or to your feet.

You have **low-risk** feet if you:

- have reduced blood flow and weak pulses in your feet
- have reduced sensation from nerve damage in your feet
- do not have any changes in the skin or shape of your feet.

You have **moderate-risk** feet if you:

- have any combination of changes in the shape, reduced blood flow and reduced sensation in your feet.

You have **high-risk** feet if you have any of the following:

- reduced blood flow and sensation together with a history of foot ulcer, previous lower limb amputation or kidney disease.

Health professionals foot checks

When to have health professional foot checks

- If you have **very low-risk** feet, have a yearly foot check.
- If you have **low-risk** feet, have your feet checked at least once a year.
- If you have a **moderate-risk** feet, have your feet checked every 3-6 months.
- If you have **high-risk** feet, have your feet checked at least every 1-3 to months.

See a doctor or podiatrist earlier if you notice any changes in your feet.

What does a foot check involve?

A foot check is done by a diabetes health professional, usually a doctor, podiatrist, or diabetes educator. The health professional will examine your feet for any current problems and decide how likely you are to develop a foot problem in the future. To do this, they will:

- look at the condition of your toenails, the skin on your feet and the shape of your feet
- feel the pulse in your feet to check the circulation (blood flow)
- check the nerves in your feet, usually by touching the soles of your feet with a thread of nylon called a monofilament
- check your shoes to make sure they are the best fit for your feet.

Looking after your feet

There are several things you can do to reduce your risk of foot problems.

Check your feet daily. Get to know your feet and check them every day. Use a mirror or ask a family member or carer to help if you have trouble reaching your feet. Check all areas of your feet including the soles and between the toes. Look for:

- dry skin or excessive moisture
- thickened skin, such as calluses or corns
- breaks in the skin, such as cracks, blisters or ulcers
- signs of infection, including redness or darker skin than usual
- any change in the shape and thickness of your nails, and any in-grown nails
- any change in the shape of your feet, such as bunions or claw toes.

Take care of your skin. Wash your feet every day. Be sure to dry all areas thoroughly, especially between the toes. Apply moisturiser every day but not between the toes. Keep the area between your toes dry to reduce the risk of getting fungal infections.

Avoid using over-the-counter corn cures as they can cause ulcers in people with diabetes.

Look after your nails. Cut your nails straight across and gently file any sharp edges with a nail file. Cutting down into the corners can cause in-grown nails. You may need to ask someone to help if you cannot reach your feet.

Wear the right footwear. It is important to choose your footwear carefully. Make sure your shoes fit well so they do not rub against your feet.

Fastening devices (such as laces or Velcro™) and enclosed heels can help to secure your feet in your shoes. Choose a heel height of less than 2 cm and wear seamless and well-fitting socks or stockings with your shoes.

Replace your shoes when they become worn out.

What if you have HIGH-risk feet?

Take extra care. Wear shoes inside and outside your home. This is because, you could have an injury that you cannot feel if you have nerve damage in your feet.

Always check inside your shoes before wearing them. This important in case there is something like a loose seam or small pebble inside the shoe that could injure your foot.

Avoid burns. Keep heat packs or hot water bottles away from your feet. Make sure your heater is at least one meter away from your feet. Wear shoes and layers of socks if your feet are cold.

See a podiatrist. See a podiatrist regularly if you have a high-risk feet.

Ask your general practitioner (GP) if you are eligible for a Medicare rebate to see a podiatrist.

Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Gold Card holders are entitled to free podiatry services from private podiatrists.

Check whether you can get a rebate for podiatry services if you have private health insurance.

Wear prescribed footwear. If you have HIGH-risk feet, your health professional may recommend prescribed footwear and insoles. It is important to wear these correctly to reduce your risk of developing foot ulcers.

When do you need to seek help urgently?

See a health professional **urgently** even if a foot injury seems minor when there is:

- any sign of infection such as discharge, continuing heat or pain in your feet
- skin breakdown such as an ulcer, bleeding or deeply cracked skin
- new pain, swelling, change in temperature or redness.



More information and support

- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) to search for the 'Annual cycle of care', 'Diabetes-related complications' and other fact sheets.
- Go to [ndss.com.au/annual-cycle-of-care-podcasts/](https://www.ndss.com.au/annual-cycle-of-care-podcasts/) and listen to Episode 5 Foot health – Seeing a podiatrist, and other episodes in the Annual Cycle of Care podcast series.
- Go to [footforward.org.au](https://www.footforward.org.au) to find out more about looking after your feet.
- Go to [healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) to find podiatrist near you.



Top tips

- Wash your feet every day and dry all areas and in between the toes.
- Get to know your feet and check them every day.
- Ask your diabetes health professional if you have **very-low, low, moderate, or high-risk** feet. Discuss foot checks and how to best look after your feet with them.
- See a health professional **urgently** for all foot injuries.

Notes

The NDSS and you

Whether you have just been diagnosed with diabetes, or have been living with diabetes for a while, the NDSS provides a range of support services, information, and subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, stay healthy and live well. For access to more resources (including translated versions), or to find out more about support services, go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice and if you have any concerns about your health or further questions, you should contact your health professional.