

Simple Steps to healthy feet: foot care routine

OBJECTIVE: This session will allow you to communicate why foot care is important if you have diabetes, and recommend a simple daily routine that can help maintain good foot health.

Here are some points to help explain to group members, why looking after their feet is an important part of their diabetes care:

- ◆ People with diabetes are more likely to develop foot problems.¹ This is because raised blood sugar can damage the sensation in the feet and can also affect circulation, which can lead to less blood supply reaching the feet and may cause problems with cuts and sores healing. Because of this, what may seem like minor foot problems such as cracked or dry skin can worsen more quickly compared to people who don't have diabetes.¹
- ◆ If left untreated, minor foot problems can lead to more serious complications, such as ulceration and even amputation.¹ 25 diabetes-related amputations are now carried out every day in England.² But if you have diabetes there are steps you can take to help reduce your risks of serious complications.
- ◆ Checking feet on a daily basis is particularly important if routine appointments have been rescheduled or cancelled and contact with their healthcare professional has been reduced.

The Simple Steps daily foot care routine

You can demonstrate to the group a daily routine that people with diabetes should follow at home to help keep their feet healthy. Remember to emphasise that this routine should be carried out every day to be most effective. Emphasis should also be placed on demonstrating how simple and easy it is to integrate this into a daily routine.

It's important to remind members that as well as checking their own feet every day at home, they should have their feet checked by a healthcare professional at least once a year (there's more on this in the next training session).



TIP: Talking about serious conditions such as ulceration and amputation can be scary, so be sure to reassure your members that most foot problems can be prevented with good, regular foot care.

Here are the three daily steps:

1

CHECK feet every day after taking off shoes and socks. Look for changes in the foot skin such as dry, hard, broken or cracked skin, scabs or conditions like callus. Check that both feet are the same temperature and neither too hot nor too cold. Check between the toes and make sure the toenails are not too long or dig into the skin.

If group members have any concerns, they should contact their GP, nurse or podiatrist straight away. You should also mention that some people might struggle to check their own feet so could ask for help from family and friends, or use a mirror to check the soles of their feet.

TIP: There is more information for members on what to look out for when checking their feet at home and how to identify conditions like dry skin, callus and ulceration in the third training session.

2

WASH and dry feet daily, paying particular attention to the space between the toes. Washing daily is a simple way to keep feet and toenails clean and away from infection.

TIP: Adding a daily foot care routine to their other daily diabetes management routines could feel daunting for members. You can suggest/discuss ways of incorporating this into group members' daily routines – they may find it useful to set a reminder on their phone, do it before or after a daily bath or shower, or before they put their socks on in the morning or after they take them off at night.³ You can also point them towards the patient leaflet which is available in a number languages and can be downloaded and printed at home, and suggest using the diarised tear off sheet to help them keep on top of their routine. This is available at: www.flexitol.co.uk/simple-steps

3

PROTECT your feet by applying a moisturiser that contains urea to feet once daily, even if feet appear healthy.

Why urea? It is important to advise members to make sure any foot cream they use contains urea. Creams that contain urea help to:

- Quickly improve skin dryness and improve the skin's ability to stay hydrated
- Maintain skin flexibility to help treat cracks and dry feet
- Reduce the build-up of thick skin and callus.

TIP: There are different strengths of urea-based emollient. A 10% urea cream should be used even if the foot skin appears healthy, as this will help prevent foot health issues occurring. If members need to treat issues like callus, a 25% urea cream should be used. Make sure group members know that creams should never be applied to ulcerated or infected skin and if they have any changes to the condition of their feet, they should seek advice from a healthcare professional immediately.

Find out more at www.flexitol.co.uk/simple-steps

NEXT SESSION: When to contact or visit your healthcare professional

References

1. Diabetes UK, Diabetes and foot problems. Available at <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/complications/feet> [Last Accessed September 2020]
2. Sky News, Diabetes: More than 9,000 amputations a year in England caused by the disease. Available at <https://news.sky.com/story/diabetes-more-than-9-000-amputations-a-year-in-england-caused-by-the-disease-11944156>, February 2020 [Last accessed September 2020]
3. Diabetes UK, How to look after your feet, <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/complications/feet/taking-care-of-your-feet> [Last accessed September 2020]