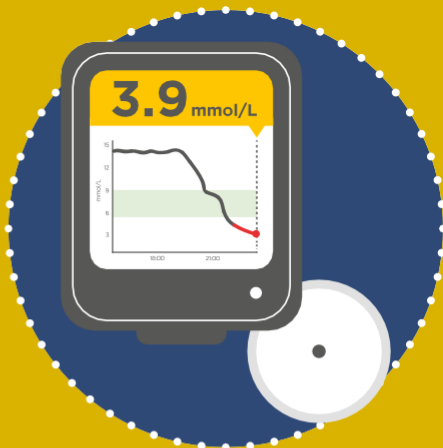


Let's talk feet and your diabetes

Developed with support of SEREN Connect diabetes education and All Wales Diabetes Patient Reference group



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Understanding diabetes and your feet

This booklet explains about general foot health, the basics of taking care of your feet, and how your foot health can be affected by diabetes.

Why is it important to look after my feet if diabetes is linked to a problem in the pancreas?

Over time, having lots of glucose in the blood can affect the tiny nerves in parts of your body, including your feet and legs. This can lead to something called neuropathy. For more information on neuropathy and poor circulation see pages 11 - 13.

By learning about diabetes and how best to manage it, you can help yourself to stay healthy for as long as possible.

👉 Not everyone with diabetes will develop a foot problem, but simple steps should be taken to look after your feet. **However, if you do experience problems it's important you know where to get help, Don't Delay, ACT NOW**

👉 As with all diabetes complications, the best way to reduce the risk is to try and keep your blood glucose levels within range as often as possible. Ask your GP or diabetes team for advice if you are struggling.



REMEMBER

It is important to attend your annual review appointments where your feet will be checked by a healthcare professional

The basics:

Who looks after your foot health?

- 🦶 The first and best person to look after your feet is **you** – this booklet will give you information on how to do this
- 🦶 Your GP, practice nurse or diabetes team will check your feet annually and answer any concerns you may have. They can refer you onto other services for further advice or treatment
- 🦶 If required, they may refer you to a podiatrist (used to be called a chiropodist) who is an expert in looking after feet and can provide specialist advice to support you how to care for your feet or provide treatment to reduce any foot problems found.



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I keep a log on my phone of my last appointment and any results I've had. The appointments add up; diabetes clinic, HbA1c check, eye check, foot check so it's good to be organised.

It feels a lot better to have developed a way of being more proactive with my health so I know what's going on rather than burying my head in the sand which I tended to do before.

Gareth, living with diabetes

What to expect from an annual foot check

Your foot check makes up part of your annual review, so once a year a healthcare professional should be taking a look at your feet. This can ensure that they are as healthy as possible.

- 👉 You will need to remove your shoes and socks (ideally don't wear tights on that day)
- 👉 They will check your feet, legs, skin, toes, circulation, pulse and nerve supply
- 👉 They will ask you some questions about your foot care routine
- 👉 They will identify any foot problems often referred to as hazards and how you can support yourself to reduce these hazards and the risk of developing further problems
- 👉 If you aren't told, or you want more information, feel free to ask questions

Your annual review takes place either at your GP surgery, or with your diabetes team. If you're unable to make your appointment, make sure you let them know so that it can be rearranged for a more suitable time.

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I used to hate taking my shoes and socks off in clinic when I was younger, I would get really embarrassed by it. But when I thought about it, it was a small price to pay to make sure my feet are healthier for longer, so I tried to think of the bigger picture.

Dan, living with Diabetes

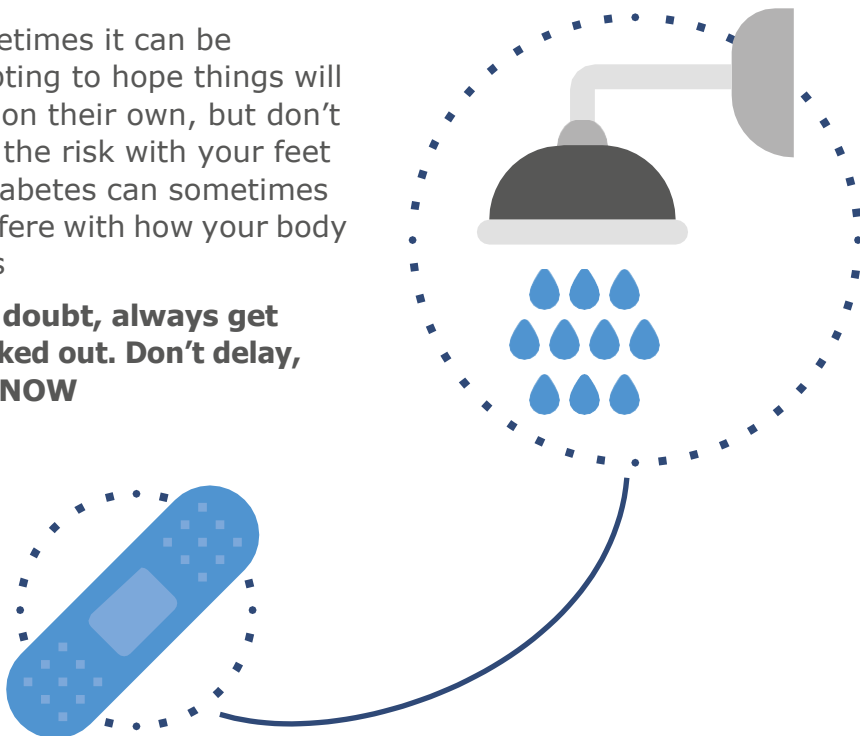
Looking after your feet

Check your feet every day

- 👉 Check the top, the bottom and in between your toes
- 👉 Look for any open areas such as a wound, cut, graze or any fluid
- 👉 Cover any open area with a dry sterile dressing
- 👉 If you find a blister, a cut, an ingrown toenail, or ulcer (wound) on your foot it's best to get medical attention - contact your GP, podiatrist or diabetes team
- 👉 Sometimes it can be tempting to hope things will heal on their own, but don't take the risk with your feet as diabetes can sometimes interfere with how your body heals
- 👉 **If in doubt, always get checked out. Don't delay, ACT NOW**

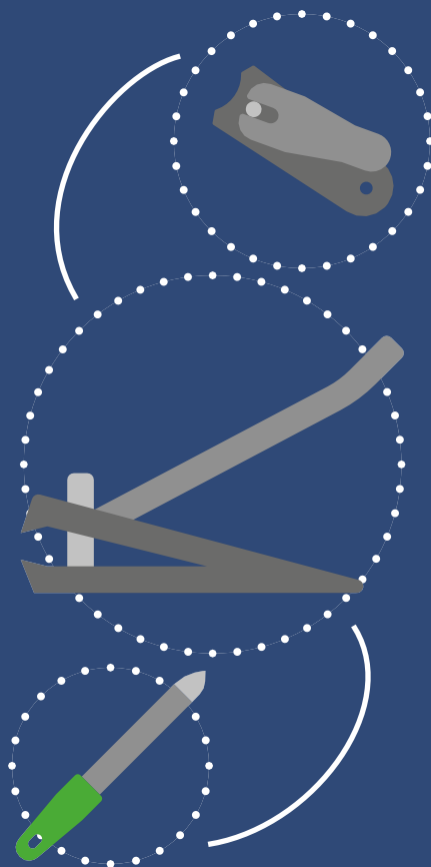
Clean your feet every day

- 👉 Wash your feet with warm soapy water
- 👉 Remember to dry them including in between your toes
- 👉 After washing your feet, moisturise them to prevent cracks especially on your heels
- 👉 Avoid moisturising between your toes as this can increase fungal infections



Cut your toenails

- ✎ Cut the nail straight across using a nail clipper, avoiding cutting down the sides
- ✎ Smooth any sharp edges using a nail file
- ✎ As your nails grow again it is best to regularly file them to the natural shape of the nail
- ✎ Avoid cutting your nails too short
- ✎ Cut or file your toenails regularly as this helps you avoid ingrowing toenails
- ✎ Ingrown toenails can occur on any toe and may be red, painful and swollen. They can become infected and you may see pus coming from them
- ✎ If this happens keep the area covered with a dry sterile dressing and contact your GP, podiatrist or diabetes team – they may treat it and/or give you antibiotics



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I'd had a toenail that used to give me some problems, but then it would get better - this one time it got really sore and started to look nasty. I had to give in and get a professional to look at it. **I wish I'd been more proactive sooner.** It's good to know who I can contact about different parts of my health.

Sean, living with diabetes

Deal with sweaty feet

It's common for your feet to sweat at times, but if you sweat excessively, this can lead to the development of skin infections like athlete's foot, ingrown toe nails and/or smelly feet.

You can try to minimise this by:

- 👣 Washing your feet daily
- 👣 Changing your socks every day, or more regularly if needed
- 👣 Changing your socks after sport or exercise
- 👣 Choosing cotton socks rather than manmade fibres such as nylon or polyester
- 👣 Trying not to wear the same pair of shoes all the time to give your shoes time to dry out
- 👣 Bringing trainers home to dry rather than leaving them in a locker or boot bag
- 👣 Checking between the toes for redness or itching
- 👣 Contacting your GP or pharmacist for advice if your feet are itchy or you have a rash - this may be athlete's foot and requires treatment. Do not scratch this area as it could break the skin. You might also need to apply the cream or spray again if it comes back in the future.



Shoes

Living with diabetes means there are lots of things that you need to think about, manage and be aware of, both short and long term.

Shoes that don't fit properly can cause lots of problems to your feet, like blisters and ingrown toenails. Always wear the right shoe for the occasion – whether this is supportive work shoes, trainers for keep fit, comfy slippers at home or protective shoes for working in the building trade.

When buying new shoes:

- There are lots of different types of shoes and some will suit your foot shape better than others; try not to squeeze your feet into shoes that are fashionable if they'll rub you
- Many shoe shops will help measure your feet to make sure you get the right size
- You should check there is enough gap between your longest toe and the end of your shoe. You should be able to press your thumb down and not touch your toes

- Formal shoes for work should have a good supportive base and fastening to hold the foot at the back of the shoe
- Sports shoes need to have a fastening and good support to help avoid injury
- Watch out for any seams in shoes as they may rub and cause blisters or hard skin to develop. If you start to get problems, it's best to change your shoes for ones that will fit better and are less likely to rub.



TOP TIP - NEVER BURST A BLISTER

This is the body's natural protection whilst it heals itself. Keep it covered until the fluid goes.



Worrying about developing a foot wound

Thankfully not everyone develops a foot wound but if you do it's important to get it seen straight away. A wound is any break in the skin and can often be called an ulcer. If not treated it can lead to further problems.

What causes them?

- 👣 Wounds or ulcers can develop anywhere on the foot if due to injury
- 👣 They can be found on the sole of the foot, tips or tops of toes and side of the foot
- 👣 Sometimes you might accidentally drop an object in your shoe and not feel it
- 👣 The first you might know anything is wrong, is when you see a stain on your sock

What can I do?

- 👣 Ensure you know who to contact if you have a problem.
- 👣 Keep the area covered and rest the foot until you see the podiatrist or GP.
- 👣 Getting it seen straight away will improve the healing. Never worry about seeing the podiatrist or GP, they are only too pleased to help:
Don't delay, ACT NOW



Going on holiday?

It is easy to forget about your feet on holiday but remember they need looking after as well.

- 👉 Don't forget to apply sunscreen to your feet
- 👉 Wear shoes as often as possible as you're more likely to cut your feet walking barefoot
- 👉 Be extra careful if walking on hot surfaces like sand as you can burn your feet
- 👉 Check your feet daily for any cuts or breaks in the skin
- 👉 Include a first aid kit in your diabetes supplies with some dry sterile dressings
- 👉 Remember to moisturise your feet to prevent any cracks in the skin



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I had a bite from a bug on my ankle that turned nasty. The cause wasn't anything to do with diabetes, but struggling to manage my blood glucose levels meant it prevented my foot from healing and I needed help from my podiatrist to treat it. **Don't delay going to get seen**, because infections can spread quickly.

Stacey, living with diabetes

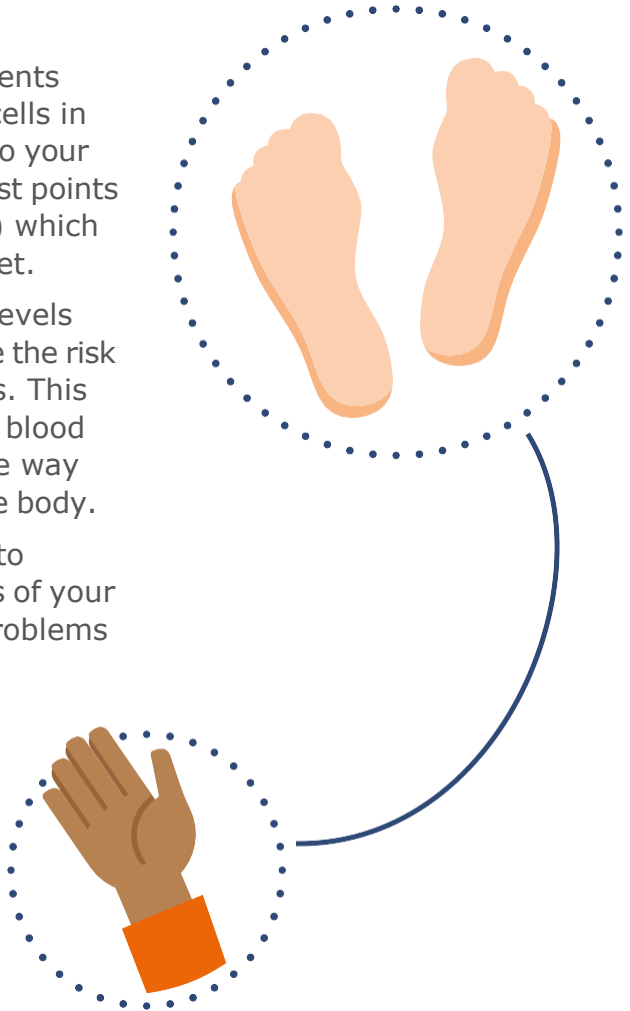
Your circulatory system

Your body is made up of lots of different systems that all have a role in keeping you healthy. An important one of these is your cardiovascular (blood circulatory) system.

Your blood is pumped around your body and supplies oxygen, nutrients and hormones to the cells in your vital organs and to your extremities (the furthest points away from your heart) which are your hands and feet.

Higher blood glucose levels can, over time, increase the risk of circulation problems. This is because changes to blood vessels can restrict the way blood flows through the body.

If the blood isn't able to circulate or reach parts of your body properly, then problems can develop.



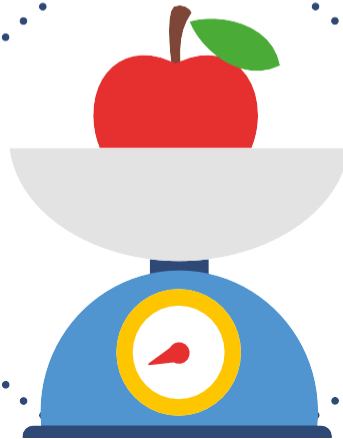
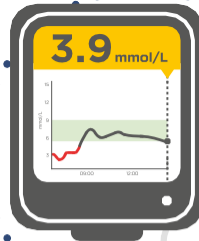
How to help yourself #Tips

- 1 Learn about managing diabetes and how it affects you and your body
- 2 Eat a balanced diet and learn how to carbohydrate count
- 3 Ensure you are in a good routine of taking the right amount of medication (e.g. insulin, Metformin) at the right time.
- 4 Try to stay active and build some regular exercise into your daily routine
- 5 Take an interest in your annual review results; don't be afraid to ask if there are results you would like explained to you
- 6 Avoid smoking or access support to help you quit. See page 16 for more info
- 7 Attend your health care appointments or rearrange any that you can't make
- 8 Ask your GP or diabetes team for additional help if there's anything you don't understand or if you want more education

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Developing a regular routine of checking your bloods, and understanding how to use those numbers to inform the decisions you make throughout the day will really help you manage your diabetes.

Ceri, living with diabetes



What if you develop neuropathy?

When diabetes-related neuropathy first develops, it may not show any symptoms, so you may be unaware.

This is why it's important to always attend your annual review appointments and make sure you have access to the care available to you. When changes are detected early, treatment is more likely to be effective. If you develop noticeable symptoms contact your podiatrist, GP or diabetes team as soon as possible.

Symptoms (in hands or feet) may include:

- 🦶 Tingling, numbness or pins and needles
- 🦶 Burning, or shooting pain
- 🦶 Cuts on your hands, feet or legs that are not healing
- 🦶 Less ability to feel pain or changes in temperature
- 🦶 Sensitivity when something touches you
- 🦶 Loss of balance and coordination

”

I noticed a tingling feeling in the bottom of my feet when I was trying to go to sleep. I was a bit nervous to ask about it. When I did, my team helped me to adjust my routine which brought my bloods down and I don't get it anymore. I wish I'd mentioned it sooner. It's always better to ask than to worry in silence!

Alex, living with diabetes

Neuropathy can also affect other parts of your body

This can include:

- 👉 Loss of bowel control, constipation or diarrhoea particularly at night
- 👉 Feeling sick, bloated
- 👉 Low blood pressure which can make you feel faint or dizzy when standing up
- 👉 Rapid heartbeat
- 👉 Excessive sweating, or a lack of sweating
- 👉 Problems with sexual dysfunction
- 👉 Difficulty fully emptying your bladder of urine
- 👉 Difficulty with the way your muscles work or muscle weakness

If you notice any of the above symptoms as you get older, talk to your GP or diabetes team and they will be able to help support you with your diabetes management, or any additional treatment you may need.



Every day is a School day

Looking after your health means learning about other conditions that can be linked to diabetes. Your diabetes team may start to talk about some of these, so it's good to familiarise yourself with them and what they mean.

Some of the terms can include:

- 🦶 Cardiovascular disease (affects your heart)
- 🦶 Nephropathy (affects your kidneys)
- 🦶 Retinopathy (affects your eyes)
- 🦶 Neuropathy (affects your nerve endings)
- 🦶 Sexual dysfunction (affects your ability to enjoy sex)

Though these terms and conditions can feel scary the more you learn about your health, the more understanding you can develop of what you can do to keep yourself healthy and live well and reduce complications.

Attending your healthcare appointments and making sure you have your annual health checks completed each year, helps you and your team keep track of your overall health.

Smoking and vaping

Smoking carries a risk to everyone, but it's especially important to think twice about starting or continuing to smoke if you also live with diabetes.

This is because diabetes can increase the risk of heart (cardiovascular) disease and smoking increases this risk further. The nicotine and chemicals such as tar and carbon monoxide in cigarettes also make the blood vessels harden and narrow, reducing the blood flow around the body, especially to the feet, since they are the furthest point away from the heart.

The current advice on e-cigarettes and vaping states 'the use of nicotine by children and young people is unsafe, and harmful to health; it can cause addiction and harm the developing brain, and there are no benefits for children and young people to vape.'¹

Always remember - being honest about your smoking status when asked by your GP or healthcare team is important, as it can sometimes affect the medications or treatment that are available to you.

¹ Public Health Wales, 2017

If you are a smoker and need support to give up, talk to your GP or to your diabetes team and they can point you in the direction of services designed to help with this, or visit: www.helpmequit.wales for more information.

