

DIABETIC FOOT CARE: TREATMENT AND PREVENTION



Diabetes is a disease that affects many aspects of a person's body. Feet are particularly vulnerable because damage to the nerves and blood vessels in the feet can cause numbness and reduced sensation. When this happens, the person can be injured or have an open wound but not feel anything. Without treatment, the wound will get worse and can lead to serious complications, even amputation.

This video shows how to take care of a foot wound on a person with diabetes and some tips on avoiding injury.

Supplies

To treat a diabetic foot wound, or to be prepared in case one happens, these are supplies to have on hand:

- > Saline spray to clean the wound
- > Recommended dressing to cover the wound
 - Silicone dressing is easier to remove because it doesn't stick to the skin
- > Tape or gauze wrap to keep the dressing in place
- > Disposable gloves
- > Towel to support the person's foot and keep the surface clean
- > Zip-lock plastic bags for disposal of treatment materials
 - Don't put used materials directly in the garbage
- > Off-loading boot (if recommended by health care professional)

Costs

An off-loading boot that takes the pressure off the wound is considered "durable medical equipment" (DME). DME is covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and most insurance plans cover this if a physician certifies that the boot is "medically necessary." There may be deductibles and copays and you may have to use a specific vendor. If you purchase a boot online, be sure to ask your health care professional exactly what is needed because there are many varieties to choose from. The other supplies are disposable and are generally not covered by insurance, but it's a good idea to check.

Steps in Treatment

1. Wash your hands thoroughly
2. Put on a fresh pair of disposable gloves
3. If there is an old dressing, remove it carefully
4. Place it in the zip-lock plastic bag for disposal
5. Remove your gloves and place in the disposal bag
6. Wash your hands again
7. Cleanse the wound with mild soap and water or saline spray and pat dry
8. Put on a fresh pair of disposable gloves
9. Apply a clean recommended dressing
10. Use tape gauze wrap to keep the dressing in place

Signs of Infection

When changing the dressing, make sure you look for any signs of infection. These include:

- > Redness
- > Swelling
- > Change in drainage
- > Fever
- > Chills
- > Increased pain

If any of these occurs, and especially if you observe more than one, contact your health care professional immediately.

Preventing Diabetic Foot Wounds

- > Early detection is important. In addition to checking the person's feet when changing a dressing, which may happen only every 3 to 5 days, it is important to check the feet every day whether there is a wound or not. Look for blisters or sores, bruises or cuts, or dry or cracked skin. Check between the toes as well as the tops and bottoms of the feet.
- > Wash the person's feet every day with lukewarm water and mild soap.
- > Gently pat dry, especially between the toes where infection can occur.
- > Trim the person's toenails or arrange to have this done by a podiatrist (a foot doctor).
- > Make sure the person wears socks and shoes while out of bed. Always check the insides of shoes to identify rough spots and to remove items that can cause injury.
- > It is important to keep active.

Other Resources

- > [“Diabetes and Foot Problems”](#) is a comprehensive summary for people with diabetes prepared by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health. A [Spanish](#) version is also available.
- > [“Diabetes—taking care of your feet,”](#) prepared by MedlinePlus, a website of the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. National Library of Medicine, is a short summary of prevention advice.
- > The American Diabetes Association has information on [foot care and complications](#) as well as other aspects of diabetes care.
- > For veterans and caregivers of veterans, go to www.caregiver.va.gov or call 1-855-260-3274 for more information about resources and support.

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