Diabetes and foot problems

Information for patients
Diabetes and foot problems
Diabetes mellitus, usually known as diabetes, is a chronic and so far incurable disease. There are an estimated 250,000 people living with diabetes in Belgium and this number is expected to double by 2025. The disease causes characteristic high sugar levels in the blood and can lead to a number of complications.

Due to a combination of these complications, people with diabetes often get ulcers on their feet. Good patient information and clinical monitoring are necessary to prevent these problems. Our aim in this brochure is to help you with this. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask your doctor, diabetes nurse or podiatrist.

The diabetes team
WHY IS YOUR DIABETES TREATMENT IMPORTANT?

Your diabetes treatment may consist of an adapted diet, medication in the form of tablets or insulin, or a combination of these. The aim of this treatment is to achieve a normal blood sugar level. A normal blood sugar level means a value of between 80 and 150 mg/dL.

The purpose of good blood sugar control is to prevent the long-term complications of diabetes. If you control your blood sugar correctly, the likelihood of these complications will be low. The complications can be divided into two groups:

1. Problems affecting the nerves
2. Problems affecting the blood vessels (heart, eyes, kidneys, legs and brain)

Problems affecting the nerves, the blood vessels or a combination of the two can in turn lead to foot problems such as ulcers and infections.

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

HERE ARE SOME TIPS:

✗ Wash your feet daily using lukewarm water, a soft face flannel and non-irritating soap. Do not forget to wash between your toes!

✗ Check the water temperature using a thermometer (max. 37°C).

✗ If you use a foot bath, this should be for no longer than five minutes, to prevent softening the skin.

✗ Dry carefully using a soft towel and do not forget to dry between your toes!

✗ Apply a moisturising cream, but NOT between your toes.

✗ Change your socks or stockings every day.

✗ Always wear socks or stockings when you wear shoes. It is preferable to wear socks or stockings made of cotton or wool.
✗ Wear socks that are not tight and do not have thick seams, creases or holes.

✗ Check the insides of your shoes for rough patches and foreign bodies before you put them on.

✗ File your toenails straight so that they extend just over the ends of your toes.

✗ Always use hard cardboard nail files to care for your toenails.

✗ Visit a pedicurist or podiatrist regularly for toenail care.

---

**DAILY FOOT INSPECTION**

Look at your feet daily (including the soles and between your toes) to search for calluses, blisters, cracks, bruises and ulcers.

- Be aware of any change in colour (redness, blueness or paleness).
- Look out for calluses, corns or any change in the shape of your feet.
- Have calluses removed quickly and always by an expert.
- Look out for any swelling or change in temperature.
- Wear glasses if necessary and inspect your feet in a well-lit area.
- If necessary ask a family member or friend to help you or use a mirror.
WHAT YOU MUST NOT DO

Some general household remedies can cause ulcers, so you should **not use:**

- ✓ hot water bottles or cherry pit cushions
- ✓ heaters close to your feet
- ✓ metal nail clippers and metal nail files
- ✓ strong ointments or plasters for removing corns or calluses

Never walk barefoot, even at home.

DO NOT WEAR:

- ✓ poorly fitting shoes
- ✓ tight socks
- ✓ tight bandages

SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RIGHT</th>
<th>WRONG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For cold feet</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To clean your feet</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sitting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wearing socks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buying shoes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- ✓ temperature: max. 37°C
- duration: max. 5 min.
WHAT YOU SHOULD LOOK OUT FOR WHEN BUYING SHOES

When you buy new shoes you should remember the advice set out below.

Make sure that your shoes:

✔ Are suited to the shape of your feet.

✔ Are long, wide and deep enough to provide space for your toes and any insoles. Insert your insoles when trying on shoes.

✔ Have a wide heel no more than two or three centimetres high (no high heels).

✔ Made of flexible material (preferably leather) with a smooth internal finish and no thick seams and nothing sharp sticking out.

✔ Have strong laces or velcro fastenings over the tongue so that the foot is held in place and cannot slip.

✔ A strong heel (“counter”) to prevent the heel slipping in and out of the shoe.

✔ A strong sole and adequate “rocker” movement, which means that the heel lifts up at least 1.5 cm when you press down on the toe of the shoe.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT A FOOT PROBLEM OCCURRING

• Take care of your feet, socks and shoes.

• Have your feet checked regularly by a specialist team so problems can be identified at an early stage.

• Make sure your diabetes is correctly controlled.

• Watch your weight.

• Stop smoking.

• Keep your feet soft, healthy and free of injuries!
THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY DIABETIC FOOT CLINIC AT UZ LEUVEN

WHAT DOES THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY DIABETIC FOOT CLINIC OFFER?

As a patient with diabetes, you can come to the foot clinic for:

- ✔ Treatment for foot ulcers.
- ✔ Prevention and treatment of foot problems by a multidisciplinary team.
- ✔ Tailor-made orthopaedic shoes, semi-orthopaedic shoes and supportive insoles.
- ✔ Medically necessary foot care from a podiatrist.
- ✔ Advice from the diabetes nurse in connection with diabetes control.
- ✔ Advice on foot care and shoes.

WHAT SHOULD YOU BRING TO THE DIABETIC FOOT CLINIC?

- ✔ Your diabetes passport
- ✔ The shoes you usually wear
- ✔ Bandages and wound care products
- ✔ Blood results from your GP
- ✔ Your blood sugar diary

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM?

Foot clinic coordinators

- ✔ Dermatologist: dr. Mie Flour
- ✔ Orthopaedic surgeons: prof. dr. Giovanni Matricali
  dr. Jos Stuyck
- ✔ Vascular surgeon: dr. Sabrina Houthoofd
- ✔ Diabetologists: prof. dr. Chantal Mathieu
  prof. dr. Pieter Gillard
  dr. Katrien Benhalima
  Endocrinology staff at UZ Leuven
On request: clotting and vascular disorders; plastic, reconstructive and aesthetic surgery

Diabetes nurses: Katie Boussemaere, Rudi Caron, Peggy Calewaert, Carine Corthaut, Hilde De Keyser, Petra Imbrechts, Leen Noens, Nadine Pardon, Katrien Rouffé, Mimi Theunissen, Saskia Vanderwegen en Tinne Wouters

Orthopaedic shoe technician: Vandersteen, tel. 03 651 68 87

Podiatrists: Kevin Deschamps, Ellen Busschots

Wound care nurse: Marina Reynaerts

Nurses, plaster technicians and logistical staff from surgical outpatient clinic E 427

MORE INFORMATION

The multidisciplinary diabetic foot clinic is held every Wednesday and Friday morning from 08.00 to 11.00, by appointment.

To make or rebook clinic appointments please call the following telephone numbers: 016 34 48 50, 016 34 48 51 or 016 34 48 52.