

Diabetes: Taking Care from Head to Toe!

By

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If you have diabetes, pay special attention to your skin, eyes, teeth, gums, and feet. These areas are at increased risk for complications due to your diabetes. This month's column talks about how you can take care of your body from head to toe, so read on!

Since your **skin** is the first line of defense against infection, some tips for keeping your skin healthy are as follows:

- Bathe or shower daily, towel-drying your skin thoroughly but gently.
- Prevent dry skin by using mild soaps and moisturizers a humidifier in winter may help if the air is dry.
- **Don't** put lotion between your toes, in your skin folds, or in your armpits. Use powder to keep these areas dry.
- Treat cuts right away. Wash with soap & water & cover with a clean bandage.
- See a health care provider right away for major cuts, burns, or infections.
- See a dermatologist about skin problems that need further treatment.
- Use sunscreen!

Having diabetes increases your risk for **eye** disorders including glaucoma, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy. An eye disease of the retina, it is the most common complication of type-2 diabetes and is the leading cause of blindness in the U.S. Controlling your blood sugar can help prevent or delay this condition, so see an eye doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- Blurry or double vision
- Trouble reading signs or books
- Pressure in your eyes
- Spots or floaters in your eyes
- Chronic red eyes
- Lines don't look straight
- Problems seeing things off to the side

Remember to see an eye doctor every year for an eye exam. This will increase your chance of detecting an eye disease early so it can be treated.

People with diabetes, especially those with poor blood sugar control, are at increased risk for periodontal (gum) disease. If left untreated, gum disease can ultimately lead to tooth loss. For healthy **teeth and gums** follow these tips:

- Brush teeth at least twice a day.
- Floss every day.
- Visit your dentist every six months for a routine cleaning and check-up.

See your dentist immediately if you have signs of gum disease, such as red, swollen, tender, or bleeding gums, bad breath, or changes in the way partial dentures or bridges fit. Inform your dentist that you have diabetes and provide information about medications you are taking.

For people with diabetes, foot sores or ulcers can become infected, cause disability, and even lead to amputations. Have your **feet** checked annually by your health care provider and take care of your feet every day at home by doing the following:

- Inspect your feet daily for red spots, cuts, swelling, or blisters. Use a mirror to help you see and check the bottoms of your feet.
- Wash your feet daily and dry them carefully, especially between your toes.
- Keep your skin soft and smooth with a thin coat of lotion on the tops and bottoms of your feet, but **not** between your toes. Use a lotion that does not contain alcohol and that is unscented.
- Trim toenails by trimming straight across and filing sharp edges with a nail file.
- Wear clean socks and shoes that fit well.
- Wear shoes and socks rather than walking around barefoot.
- Protect your feet from hot and cold conditions.
- Keep the blood flowing to your feet. Put your feet up when you sit; wiggle your toes and move your ankles. Don't keep your legs crossed for long periods.
- Talk to your doctor if you develop open sores or infections, or if a toe becomes red and tender (this could be an ingrown toenail).

In conclusion, by taking good care of yourself from head to toe, you will increase your chances for healthy living and decrease your chances for complications as a result of your diabetes. For more information you can contact the American Diabetes Association at 1-800-342-2383 (1-800-Diabetes) or the Hardee County Extension Office at 773-2164. (Source: ENAFS publication FCS8821)