

# Managing Foot Ulcers in People With Diabetes

According to the Canadian Diabetes Association, diabetes is a life long illness affecting 2.7 million people in Canada. Diabetes puts you at risk for problems such as foot ulcers.

## Definition of Diabetes:

Type 1	Type 2	Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM)
Affects about 10% of people with diabetes.	Affects about 90% of people with diabetes.	Affects about 3.5% of pregnant women.
The body is unable to produce insulin. Insulin is a substance that helps the body produce energy from the food we eat.	This occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin. It can also happen when the body does not make proper use of the insulin it does make.	This type of diabetes lasts for a short period of time during pregnancy. This may put mother and baby at higher risk for getting diabetes later in life.

## What is a foot ulcer?

People with diabetes may develop foot ulcers, which are sores below the ankle that don't heal on their own.

## Why should I be concerned about foot ulcers?

Foot ulcers increase the risk of infection (a germ or bacteria that invades and damages the tissues) and may reduce your quality of life. While most foot ulcers heal, when they are left untreated, they could lead to foot amputations. This could lead to lost income, longer hospital stays and a need for special therapy.

## What should I be checking my feet for?

### Signs of a Foot Ulcer:

- calluses (an area of skin that is thick or hard)
- red skin
- bleeding/leaking from a sore
- swelling

### Common Places for Foot Ulcers:

- bottom and top of toes
- front and middle of the foot
- ball of the foot
- back of the heel

### Shoes or socks that do not fit well:

Shoes or socks that are too tight or that put pressure on the foot can cause foot ulcers.



### **Who will be involved in my care?**

A team of health-care providers work together to treat foot ulcers. You can expect to meet with: doctors, nurses, chiropodists/podiatrists, diabetes educators, nutritionists, social workers and physiotherapists. You may want to keep a diary of the people you see with the date and notes from each visit.

### **How can I be involved in my care?**

You should work with your health-care team to develop a care plan that works for you. This plan may include goals such as treating foot ulcers with dressings or reducing pain.

### **How do I lower the risk of getting another ulcer?**

One in three people develop another ulcer one year after an earlier ulcer has healed. This number goes up to seven out of 10 people within five years<sup>1</sup>.

Good foot care lowers the risk of getting another ulcer. Take a look at these resources for more information on how to take care of your feet:

1. Put feet first prevent amputations: Diabetes and Foot Care:  
[http://www.idf.org/webdata/docs/T2A\\_Introduction.pdf](http://www.idf.org/webdata/docs/T2A_Introduction.pdf)
2. Steps for Healthy Feet.  
<http://cawc.net/en/index.php/public/feet/steps/>
3. Foot Care: A Step Towards Good Health:  
[http://www.diabetes.ca/documents/about-diabetes/112030\\_08-384\\_footcare\\_0413\\_lc\\_final.pdf](http://www.diabetes.ca/documents/about-diabetes/112030_08-384_footcare_0413_lc_final.pdf)

Taking control of your blood sugar can also help to prevent a foot ulcer. Blood sugars should be maintained within the following limits:

1. A1C less than 7% (A1C is an average of your blood sugar levels from the past three months. This is a blood test, and your health-care provider should have a record of this number).
2. Fasting blood sugar of 4.0 to 7.0 mmol/L.

**If you think you may have a foot ulcer, or want more information about how to lower your risk of developing a foot ulcer, please speak with your health-care provider.**

#### References

1. Frykberg, R. G., Armstrong, D. G., Giurini, J., Edwards, A., Kravette, M., Kravitz, S., et al. (2000). Diabetic foot disorders: A clinical practice guideline. American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons. *The Journal of Foot and Ankle Surgery*, 39(5 Suppl), S1-60.

This information fact sheet is developed as a supplement to the RNAO Nursing Best Practice Guideline document for nurses. Its intent is to increase your knowledge and involvement in making decisions about your health. The nursing best practice guideline, *Assessment and Management of Foot Ulcers for People with Diabetes Second Edition*, is available for public viewing and free download at [www.rnao.org/bestpractices](http://www.rnao.org/bestpractices).