

Diabetic Neuropathy: Care Instructions



Overview

When you have diabetes, your blood sugar level may get too high. Over time, high blood sugar levels can damage nerves. This is called diabetic neuropathy.

Nerve damage can cause pain, burning, tingling, and numbness. It may leave you feeling weak. The feet are often affected. When you have nerve damage in your feet, you cannot feel your feet and toes as well as normal. You may not notice cuts or sores. Even a small injury can lead to a serious infection. It's important that you follow your doctor's advice on foot care.

Sometimes diabetes damages nerves that help the body function. If this happens, your blood pressure, sweating, digestion, and urination might be affected. Your doctor may give you a target range for your blood sugar that is higher or lower than you are used to. Try to keep your blood sugar very close to this target range to prevent more damage.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Try to keep blood sugar in your target range.
 - Follow your meal plan to know how much carbohydrate you need for meals and snacks. A registered dietitian or diabetes educator can help you plan meals.
 - Try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days.
 - Check your blood sugar as many times each day as your doctor recommends.
- Take and record your blood pressure at home if your doctor tells you to. To take your blood pressure at home:
 - Ask your doctor to check your blood pressure monitor to be sure it is accurate and the cuff fits you. Also ask your doctor to watch you to make sure that you are using it right.
 - Do not use medicine known to raise blood pressure (such as some nasal decongestant sprays) before taking your blood pressure.
 - Avoid taking your blood pressure if you have just exercised or are nervous or upset. Rest at least 15 minutes before you take a reading.

- If you smoke, quit or cut back as much as you can. Smoking can increase your risk for peripheral artery disease (PAD). PAD can make neuropathy worse. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
- Limit alcohol to 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women. Too much alcohol can cause health problems.

To care for your feet

- Prevent injury by wearing shoes at all times, even when you are indoors.
- Do foot care as part of your daily routine. Wash your feet and then rub lotion on your feet, but not between your toes. Use a handheld mirror or magnifying mirror to inspect your feet for blisters, cuts, cracks, or sores.
- Have your toenails trimmed and filed straight across.
- Wear shoes and socks that fit well. Soft shoes that have good support and that fit well (such as tennis shoes) are best for your feet.
- Check your shoes for any loose objects or rough edges before you put them on.
- Ask your doctor to check your feet during each visit. Your doctor may notice a foot problem you have missed.
- Get early treatment for any foot problem, even a minor one.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have a sore on your foot and have symptoms of infection, such as:
 - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
 - Red streaks leading from the area.
 - Pus draining from the area.
 - A fever.
- You have new or worse numbness, pain, or tingling in any part of your body.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You have a new problem with your feet, such as:
 - A new sore or ulcer.
 - A break in the skin that is not healing after several days.
 - Bleeding corns or calluses.
 - An ingrown toenail.
- You do not get better as expected.

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