

DON'T BE OUT ON A LIMB

Each time a diabetes patient insists his feet are perfectly well and that foot screening is not crucial, he could not be more wrong. Ms Rathi Jayabalan, diabetes nurse educator, Diabetic Society of Singapore, warns patients against leaving something as important as foot screening to hang.



Photo :Eric Isselee

High blood sugar can affect the nerves and the vessels of the feet. When one suffers nerve damage, one may feel pins and needles, minimal ability to feel pain and other symptoms. If one gets a cut or a blister and it heals, that is well and good. But what if it does not? Damage of the blood vessels can cause poor circulation and subsequently the wound may become worse and would not heal.

Mr Ahmad*, a Malay gentleman in his fifties, lost his foot due to uncontrolled blood sugar levels. He used to cut his own corns and calluses. It was too late when he realised his foot had turned gangrenous (tissue death). He had to undergo below-the-knee amputation. Unfortunately, Mr Ahmad is not the only one guilty of cutting his own corn and calluses; my colleagues have encountered a number of similar cases and therein lies the danger.

Anyone with diabetes is at risk of developing foot ulcers and therefore in need of a foot examination to assess his risk of developing diabetic foot ulcers. Foot screening helps the healthcare professional identify any serious conditions. It also compels the patient to understand the level of risk and take necessary measures. The healthcare professional can also refer the patient to other medical personnel, for example, a podiatrist for treatment.

It is recommended that people with diabetes have a comprehensive foot examination by a nurse, doctor or a podiatrist at least once a year. In addition, they should allow their feet to be inspected during medical visits

for sores, cracked skin, calluses, blisters, and bone and joint abnormalities. This will certainly decrease the risk of amputation and preserve their quality of life.

Do not simply stop at foot screening. People who go for foot screenings at the Diabetic Society of Singapore also receive tips on daily foot care. Here are a few to take note of:

Do:

1. examine your feet everyday for any cuts, cracks, corns, calluses, dry skin, swelling, in-grown toe nails, discolouration, temperature (hot/cold) and also anything not normal.
2. apply lotion on the top and bottom of your feet.
3. wash your feet daily with mild soap and lukewarm water. Dry the areas in between your toes.
4. wear shoes that are comfortable and fit well. Before putting on your shoes, check to ensure that there are no objects within them.
5. change your socks daily and ensure that they fit well and have no tears in them.
6. cut your toenails straight across
7. show your doctor/ nurse your feet each time you visit them.

Don't:

1. use corn/callus medications or cut your own corns and calluses. See a podiatrist instead.
2. apply moisturiser in between your toes.
3. use hot water.
4. wear tight socks.

* not his real name

Foot screening services are available at Sembawang-Hong Kah and Central Diabetes Education & Care Centres (DECC) For more information about foot screening services by Diabetic Society of Singapore, please ring 65649818 or 63980282.



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Callers who call HealthLine can speak to nurse advisors on any general health matters such as exercise, nutrition, myopia, osteoporosis, cervical cancer, breast cancer and more.

Healthline Personal Advice is available during office hours.

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