

Poor Sensation (Neuropathy) Information for patients

The nerves in the feet can be affected causing loss of feeling (Neuropathy). This is common in people with diabetes but can occur with other conditions. People with Neuropathy should never walk barefoot.

Neuropathy symptoms may include:

- Loss of pain sensation;
- Tingling
- Pins and needles
- Shooting pains
- Burning sensation

Loss of feeling in your feet makes you more prone to accidental injury.

If you develop a corn or callus DO NOT use corn plasters or paints as these contain strong acids which can be harmful. Do not let anyone other than a HCPC registered Chiropodist or Podiatrist cut corns or callus.

If you suffer a foot injury, however minor, this is potentially serious.

Minor cuts

These should be cleansed with cooled boiled water and covered with a non-adhesive sterile dressing e.g. Softpore. If the wound does not heal or if it gets worse seek professional help.

Do not burst blisters, dress them as above.

If you have a wound with discharge or an injury which is not healing you should seek professional medical help. Do not take chances.

Shoes/socks

Neuropathy can change the shape of your feet making shoe fitting difficult. You may develop a high arch and clawed toes.

Pressure from footwear can cause corns or callus to develop. Try to avoid this as much as possible and buy at least one pair of comfortable, well-fitting shoes. If you have difficulty finding these, seek advice from your podiatrist about appropriate footwear. You may be referred to an Orthotist for specially made shoes.

Before putting shoes on look or feel inside for any sharp edges or objects. Ensure that socks or stocking do not have prominent seams or any holes before wearing them. Seams may be less harmful if socks are worn inside out.

When buying new shoes, wear them around the house for about half an hour, then check there are no signs of redness or swelling or irritation on your feet.

Try to wear closed in shoes which will protect the feet.

If shoes or socks get wet, change them as soon as possible to avoid the feet getting too cold or the skin being chaffed.

Heat

In some people the nerves in the feet which feel temperature may be dulled. Take simple steps to prevent problems:

- Test the temperature of your bath water with your elbow before stepping into it.
- Avoid using foot spas
- Keep legs and feet warm by covering them with a blanket or shawl. DO NOT position your feet too close to hot radiators, heaters or fires.
- Remove hot water bottles from the bed before getting in. Take care not to allow electric blankets to get overheated.
- Use a high factor sun screen on feet and remember that the soles of feet can be burned too; these may be exposed to the sun when lying or lounging.
- Wear light shoes on hot sandy beaches and check inside them regularly to remove any sand or pebbles which may cause injury.
- Wear light shoes on hot tiled areas such as pool sides to avoid burning the soles of feet.
- NEVER use hot fermentations or poultices.

Cold

In some people the feelings of cold may be dulled. This means that people may have cold feet but may not be aware of it.

Try to avoid situations where the feet may get cold and wet for long periods. If the feet get wet, dry them as soon as possible and put on dry socks and shoes.

In colder weather wear layers of clothes to the legs and feet. Try to keep the feet at a constant temperature by putting on extra layers when going out in the cold. This will help prevent chilblains.

Try to keep active. The circulation slows down when people are not active and the legs and feet get cold quicker.

The legs and feet of wheelchair users can get very cold. Remember to use extra layers of clothing or a blanket to cover legs and feet.

First Aid treatments

Every break in the skin of the feet may result in a serious problem therefore every effort should be made to prevent injury.

- Minor cuts or abrasions should be cleansed with water and covered with a non-adhesive sterile dressing e.g. Softpore.
- Never place sticky plaster directly onto a wound.
- If the cut does not heal or if it gets worse then ask for professional help.
- DO NOT burst blisters; if they do burst dress them as minor cuts.

Charcot Foot

This is a very serious condition that can lead to severe deformity, disability, and even amputation.

People with neuropathy (especially those who have had it for a long time) are at risk for developing Charcot foot. Early treatment of Charcot foot is extremely important in preventing major problems.

It is important that people with neuropathy **seek advice immediately** if they notice:

- one foot feeling unusually warmer than the other;
- unusual redness in the foot;
- unusual swelling in the foot;
- pain or soreness.

A professional will examine the foot and ankle and ask about events that may have occurred prior to the symptoms. X-rays and other imaging studies and tests may be required.

Preventing Diabetes complications, including Charcot foot, can be helped by:

- keeping blood sugar levels under control –this can help reduce the speed of nerve damage in the feet;
- getting regular check-ups from a Podiatrist;
- checking *both* feet every day—and seek professional advice immediately if you notice signs of Charcot foot;
- being careful to avoid injury, such as bumping the foot or overdoing exercise;
- following the Podiatrists instructions for long-term treatment.

Tell the Podiatrist / Nurse / Doctor if you notice any of these:

- Any colour change in leg or foot.
- Any fluid or discharge from the skin, or nail.
- The foot becomes swollen / painful / uncomfortable or is throbbing.
- Any irritation e.g. severe itching or burning.
- The foot smells strange/ different.
- You feel unwell – if you develop a fever, 'flu-like symptoms' or your diabetes control becomes poor.

Remember to take care of your feet; examine them daily and ask for help when a problem develops. This may help to prevent major problems!

Podiatry Services
City of Coventry Health Centre
2 Stoney Stanton Road
Coventry
CV1 4FS

Telephone: 024 7696 1335

If you require this document in a different format or language, please contact the Trust's Equality and Diversity Department on 024 7653 6802