

# Healthy Living: Taking Care from Head to Toe<sup>1</sup>

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If you have diabetes, pay special attention to your skin, eyes, teeth, gums, and feet. These areas are at high risk for complications. Read on to learn how you can take care of your body from head to toe!

## Skin

Healthy skin is the first line of defense against infection. Tips for keeping your skin healthy include the following:

- Bathe or shower daily.
- Towel-dry skin thoroughly but gently.
- Prevent dry skin by using mild soaps and moisturizers; in winter a humidifier may help if the air is dry.
- Do not 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 and water and cover with a clean bandage. Use creams or ointments only if a member of your diabetes care team has recommended them.
- See a health care provider right away for major cuts, burns, or infections.



Figure 1. Using an unscented lotion every day can help prevent dry skin.

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- Use sunscreen when you go outside, especially between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.
- See a dermatologist about skin problems that need further treatment.

## Eyes

Having diabetes increases your risk of developing eye disorders, such as glaucoma, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy (eye disease of the retina). Diabetic retinopathy is the most common complication of type 2 diabetes and is the leading cause of blindness in the US. Controlling blood glucose and blood pressure can help prevent or delay diabetic retinopathy. 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
- Inability to perceive lines as straight
- Problems seeing things off to the side

See an ophthalmologist every year for a dilated eye exam. Doing so will increase the chance of detecting an eye disease early so it can be treated.

## Teeth and Gums

People with diabetes, especially those whose blood glucose is not well controlled, are at increased risk for periodontal (gum) disease. If left untreated, gum disease can result in tooth loss. For healthy teeth and gums follow these tips:

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

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.

Tell your dentist and dental hygienist that you have diabetes and let them know about any changes in your health condition or medications that you are taking.

### Did You Know...

*Smoking increases the risk of diabetes complications.*

*You can help prevent diabetes complications by not smoking and keeping your blood glucose level in a targeted range.*

*Talk to your diabetes care team about your targeted blood glucose level.*



Figure 2. Brushing at least twice a day is important for the whole family and is especially critical for someone with diabetes.

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## Feet

Foot sores or ulcers can become infected, cause disability, and even lead to amputations. The good news is that foot sores can be prevented.

Have your feet checked annually by your health care provider and take care of your feet every day at home. Here are a few ways to care for your feet at home:

- 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 an unscented lotion that does not contain alcohol.
- Trim toenails by cutting straight across and filing sharp edges with a nail file. If you cannot reach your feet, have a podiatrist trim your toenails.
- Wear clean shoes and socks that fit well.
- Always wear shoes and socks rather than walking barefoot. Check the insides of shoes before putting them on.
- Wear non-skid slippers in the house.
- Protect your feet from extreme temperatures.

- Keep the blood flowing to your feet. Put your feet up when you sit; wiggle your toes and move your ankles. Avoid keeping your legs crossed for long periods of time.
- Talk to a health care provider if you develop open sores or infections, or if a toe becomes red and tender (this could be an ingrown toenail).



Figure 3. Wear comfortable socks and shoes to protect your feet from injury. Never walk barefoot!  
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