

# **Skin Problems and Other Infections**

Diabetes affects your whole body. People with diabetes are at high risk for skin problems and infections. By practicing good skin care you may avoid problems.

## **How Infections Happen**

- **Germs enter through the skin**

People with diabetes often have dry skin. Dry skin is more likely to crack letting germs enter and cause infection.

- **White blood cells work slowly**

White blood cells fight infection. High blood sugar slows the work of white blood cells. When your blood sugar is high, infections can spread and may be harder to treat. Any infection can cause your blood sugar to rise. It is important to treat infections quickly.

- **Blood flow is poor**

Diabetes can damage blood flow. If blood flow is poor, oxygen, white blood cells and nutrients are slow to get to the wound to fight infection. Cuts may heal slowly and become infected.

**Signs of skin infection are:**

- redness
- throbbing pain
- cut that won't heal and smells bad

## **Foot Care**

Nerve damage can cause loss of feeling in the feet. You may not feel an injury or infection. This may delay treatment and make the infection harder to treat. Care of the feet is especially important.

## **How to Treat a Cut**

### **Small Cut**

- wash with soap and water
- put a gauze bandage over the cut
- fasten the bandage with tape - do not put tape on skin, only on bandage
- ask your doctor if you should use any betadine, alcohol, or antibiotic cream

### **Large cut**

- large cuts or burns should be seen by your doctor

# Skin Problems and Other Infections (continued)

## Fungal Infection

Fungal infections are a common problem for diabetics. The most common sites for fungal infections are at skin folds like under the arms, the groin, under the breasts, and between toes. These infections can cause itching and blisters.

## Treating Fungal Infections

Do not try to treat skin problems yourself. See your doctor to get the treatment that is right for your skin problem.

## Vaginal Infections

Women with diabetes are more likely to get vaginal yeast infections.

## Some signs of vaginal infections may be:

- vaginal itching
- a white or yellowish vaginal discharge
- burning when passing urine

## To reduce the risk of vaginal yeast infections women should:

- control blood sugar
- dry outside vaginal area well after shower or bath
- change out of wet clothes quickly
- wear cotton underwear
- avoid tight-fitting clothing
- avoid feminine hygiene sprays and douches

## To reduce risk of skin infections:

### When bathing:

- bathe skin daily using a high fat soap, like Dove, Caress, or Tone, then apply lotion except between toes
- check water temperature of bath water with a bath thermometer. Temperature should not be warmer than 90°F.

### Each day:

- check skin, especially on the feet, look for reddened areas, blisters or ingrown toenails
- change insulin injection sites to avoid lumps or depression in the skin
- drink plenty of fluids, 6 to 8 glasses of water a day

### General tips

- if you have a break in the skin that is slow to heal, call your doctor
- avoid sunburn and use a sunscreen
- don't break blisters
- don't use peroxide, iodine or any ointment without speaking to your doctor
- control your blood sugar

## Special Problems - Special Doctor

Some diabetics may need to see a **dermatologist**. This is a medical doctor trained to treat diseases of the skin. Ask your doctor for help in finding a Dermatologist.