



# Why Diabetics Need to Practice Proper Skin Care

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## Diabetic Skin Care: Tips to Protect, Strengthen, and Improve Your Skin

Since over 30 percent of diabetics will experience skin problems at one time or another, you need to watch out for skin changes, but prevention is really the best medicine. Your skin is your largest organ, and just like your liver or heart it needs care and monitoring to protect against damage from diabetes.

A healthier body starts with your daily skin care routine, and for diabetics, that will call for some special focus.

### Watching for Common Skin Problems With Diabetes

Changes in blood vessels and organ function can bring on unique skin problems, but diabetics are also more vulnerable to common skin troubles (and can experience them more severely). In some cases, it's the medication you take to control your diabetes that's to blame for allergic reactions or other skin-irritating side effects.

When you live with a metabolic disorder, it's easy to be distracted by your daily medications and blood sugar symptoms, but it's just as important to keep a close eye on any physical skin changes, like:

#### Sores

A sore can come from a cut or scrape, but sometimes it indicates a more serious condition that's tied to diabetes. NLD starts with red, raised spots, and these can become painful and eventually crack open. The biggest concern with open sores is the risk of infection.

#### Rashes

A rash or red patch is very common with an allergic reaction, but in diabetics, rashes tend to be more frequent and can point to a number of things. Keep an eye on injection sites, since a rash could indicate an allergic response to a medication.

Rashes can also come in the form of bumps or scaly patches. Diabetic blisters are rare, and although they're painless, they indicate that your blood sugar is out of control.

#### Infections

These come in all shapes and forms, and while some infections are impossible to ignore, others can be easy to miss. In either case, it's important to watch for signs of infection so you can treat it early, and avoid more serious sickness or a medical emergency.

Infections fall into a few different categories: bacterial, fungal, and viral. Most bring redness, swelling, pain and heat – all the signs of inflammation. You will often see pus with a bacterial infection (like a boil or sty), while fungal

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infections like athlete's foot generally come with a burning or insatiable itch.

A little scrape may seem like nothing to worry about, but when you're dealing with diabetes, your system cannot heal itself as efficiently as it should. In severe cases, a small wound can become a serious ulcer that leads to amputation, so it's always better to be safe than sorry and investigate any skin changes further.

## **Tips for Washing and Cleaning Your Skin**

Fortunately, many skin conditions and infections can be prevented with good hygiene and diabetic skin care routine. In many cases, you can even resolve mild skin problems with a little more attention to your washing and drying routine.

### **Frequency**

You don't necessarily have to bathe every day, especially when the air is cold and dry. You may want to "spot clean" instead: wash the surfaces of your skin that are most often exposed (like your face and hands), and those covered areas that can harbor dirt, sweat or bacteria (particularly the genitals and feet).

Wearing clean, breathable clothing will help protect your skin without promoting bacteria buildup, so you won't have to scrub away irritants as often.

### **Temperature**

Heat can be very drying, especially when your skin is exposed for too long. Turn down the water temperature to warm (there should be little to no steam), and keep showers to 10 minutes. Baths can be comforting, but long soaks in the tub can sap your skin of all its natural oils that help maintain a moisture barrier.

In the end, minimizing your water exposure means minimizing your risk for dry skin.

### **Technique**

A gentle hand makes for happy skin. Don't scrub or rub with any sort of abrasive accessory; your hands and some mild soap will be much more comfortable and safe for your skin, especially if you have any irritated areas.

You shouldn't be hasty when you step out of the shower – proper drying is just as important as good cleaning. Use an absorbent towel to pat your skin dry, and take extra care with any skin folds and joints that can trap water. After toweling-off, you can apply talcum powder anywhere skin touches skin to prevent chafing and moisture buildup.

## **Keeping Your Skin Protected**

High glucose levels make it more difficult to fight off harmful bacteria, but they can also lead to dry skin. The last step in your diabetic skin care routine should be moisturizing right after bathing (when your skin is more receptive to penetrating lotions), and using your moisturizing time to monitor your skin condition:

### **Hydrate Deeply, but Naturally**

When your skin is both dry and sensitive, you have to be especially careful with ingredients. Look for lotions that can penetrate your skin moisture, but are free of potential irritants and any "extras" that set them apart from the competition.

The best natural moisturizers will replenish your skin's moisture, not just trap it on the surface. Ingredients like urea, vitamin E, and aloe are penetrating moisturizers that are also gentle for diabetic skin. Apply it to all areas of your skin except for the areas between your toes, since moisture can build up in those crevices and foster fungal infections.

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### **Examine Closely, and Often**

Many diabetics suffer from some degree of neuropathy – a loss of feeling in the extremities. When you lose sensation in your feet, small injuries can go unnoticed. In turn, devote extra attention to all areas of your feet every day. Use a small hand-held mirror to look around the soles, the heels, and between the toes.

When it comes to clipping your nails, you may want to visit your podiatrist. They will be able to trim the nails properly, but the meeting is also a good opportunity to have a second set of eyes scan your feet for possible problems.

If you do spot a skin problem on your foot, time is of the essence. Treat any small open wound with antibiotic cream immediately after cleaning, cover lightly but securely with gauze, and don't put any pressure on the site. Callouses can also be cause for concern, so no matter how the small the problem seems, see your doctor as soon as possible for a check-up and thorough treatment.