



HEALTHY FEET

Information for patients

“Therapy Active – Living with Diabetes” is a treatment programme for patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus. Ask your doctor about it!

Contact:
office@therapie-aktiv.at
www.therapie-aktiv.at



IMPRINT:
Responsible for the content: StGKK
Übersetzung: Sprachservice.at
Stand: Juni 2014

For the purpose of legibility, any gender-specific terms refer to both men and women equally.



Type 2 diabetes

Disease Management Programme



WHAT CAN I DO FOR HEALTHY FEET DESPITE MY TYPE 2 DIABETES?

More and more people suffer from type 2 diabetes; among them, many young people. A diabetic foot condition is one of the possible long-term consequences. If this is not diagnosed and treated at an early stage, it can lead to serious problems.

So don't let it come to that! The more you actively do for your health, the more favourable the course of the disease. You should take the following points to heart:

A balanced diet

The range of foods in your diet should include lots of fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grain products, and a modest amount of animal-derived foods. Try to steer clear of foods that are high in fat and sugar. Drinking enough is vital – ideally sugar-free!

Enough exercise

Get active and gradually increase the amount of physical activity in your day. Consult with your doctor to decide which type of sport and intensity level would be best for you.

Body weight

A balanced diet and enough exercise will help you lose weight and keep it off. It is important to keep your calorie intake lower than your calorie expenditure. You can achieve this with a balanced diet that is low in fat and high in fibre, and by controlling your portion sizes.

Quit smoking

Start your new, smoke-free life today. Your doctor will be glad to help you become a non-smoker.

Take your pills regularly

If you have been prescribed medicine to reduce high blood sugar, it is vital that you take it regularly.

Diabetes training

In the diabetes training you will learn everything you need to know about diabetes, enabling you to take charge of your own health.



Get your feet checked once a year, as foot complications are painless and often go unnoticed.

Foot examination

In order to detect any complications at an early stage, "Therapy Active – Living with Diabetes" attaches great importance to regular foot examinations by a doctor. This involves checking foot pulses (at the groin, the back of the knee, the inside ankles and instep), vibration sensitivity (using a tuning fork), as well as pressure and temperature perception.

This examination should be done once a year. If necessary, your doctor will refer you to a diabetic foot clinic. You can find out what to expect at a foot examination on our website (www.therapie-aktiv.at).



WHAT COULD HAPPEN?

The diabetic foot is the result of circulatory disorders and/or inadequate nerve conduction. The danger lies mainly in the fact that nerve disorders make diabetic foot complications virtually painless, allowing them to form undetected. This is why regular foot exams are so important. Also, stable blood sugar values are vital.

Circulatory disorders

The narrowing of the arteries can lead to poor circulation. The resulting complications depend on the development and location of the constriction, and can occur in the calf, thigh or hip.

SIGNS

- ... Cool, pale feet
- ... The toe tips and edges of the feet have a blue tinge
- ... Skin is pale and thin
- ... Pain and cramps in the calves while walking
- ... Skin on tips of toes and heel starts turning black (= onset of gangrene)
- ... Intermittent claudication, i.e. the pain stops when standing still (don't let it come to that – stop walking before you start to feel pain so that the blood flow to your muscles is maintained)

Nerve disorders

A chronically elevated blood sugar level inhibits the functioning of the nervous system, as it is supplied by the smallest blood vessels. The nerve fibres in the feet and legs are particularly affected.

SIGNS

- ... Warm and very dry feet
- ... Prone to calluses and hard, cracked skin
- ... Frequent nail and skin fungus
- ... Tingling, itching (formication) and other abnormal sensations
- ... Reduced vibration sensitivity
- ... Reduced pressure perception
- ... Numbness, unsteadiness when walking
- ... Painful burning sensation and hot flushes, especially at night and at rest
- ... Reduced temperature perception, resulting in risk of burning/freezing
- ... Reduction or loss of sensation of pain
- ... Development of hammer toe or claw toe

Ulcers

Nerve damage leads to unequal weight distribution on the soles of the feet, which causes calluses. Bruises can form underneath and, at worst, burst and lead to open ulcers. If these ulcers do not heal, it may be necessary to amputate parts of the foot.

Ulcers can also form as a result of circulatory problems, e.g. in the toes or forefoot.

Therefore, if you have been positively diagnosed with circulatory and/or nerve disorders, you are urged to get professional foot care to prevent ulcers. Read more about this in the section on foot care.

All of these complications emerge gradually and over the course of years. If you detect the first signs at an early stage, you can still intervene before things worsen and you get open sores.

There's a lot you can do! If you check your feet regularly and carefully, you can quickly detect injuries or anything unusual and take action.

On the following pages you will learn what you should look out for and what you can do to keep your feet healthy.



Your feet carry you through life,
so treat them well.



Pay attention to your feet. Check them every day using this checklist.

HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF?

- ... If you have **dry, cracked skin**, taking care of your feet and applying creams will bring relief.
- ... If you have been **sweating** and your skin is damp, rinse your feet several times a day and put on a fresh pair of cotton socks every day.
- ... If you have **mildly callused skin**, remove it carefully with a pumice stone. Never use a grater or an anti-callus plaster!!!
- ... If you have **severely callused skin** and corns, you are urged to seek professional foot care with a foot care specialist who is qualified to treat diabetic feet. Discuss this with your doctor at your next check-up!
- ... If you have **blisters, lesions or injuries**, you need to apply a sterile bandage and go to your doctor immediately – even if you are not feeling any pain!
- ... You should keep off your feet until the wound is healed. If you need to go on errands, please wear **special shoes** that do not put any pressure on your feet.
- ... **Infections** are generally treated with antibiotic tablets. This decision can only be made by your attendant doctor.
- ... If your skin is **swollen, red, warm and sore (signs of infection)**, go and see your doctor!
- ... If you have a **foot malposition or pressure points**, your orthopaedic shoemaker will help you to choose the right inlays and orthopaedic footwear.
- ... If you think you may have a **nail fungus**, your dermatologist must confirm this and, if necessary, prescribe an appropriate treatment.
- ... **Cold feet** should be professionally examined to determine whether you have blood vessel damage. You should wear warm wool socks that do not put pressure on your feet. Massages, alternating warm and cold baths, and foot exercises can help! Never try to warm your feet up with hot footbaths or heaters. This could lead to severe burns due to nerve damage! Sauna visits are only allowed if your doctor gives you the go-ahead.



CHECKLIST

Always check your feet from all sides. You can use a mirror to look at the soles of your feet.

- Is your foot swollen?
- Does your foot feel warm?
- Do you see pressure points or blisters?
- Does your foot have calluses or corns?
- Does the skin look different or is it discoloured?
- Are there small lesions, cracks or scratches?
- Are the nails thicker or discoloured?
- Do you have an ingrown toenail?
- Is the skin between your toes white (fungus)?



IMPORTANT

- ... Diabetic nerve damage means that you cannot feel pain. Even if an injury does not hurt, you must immediately see your doctor!
- ... Avoid going barefoot! In order to reduce the risk of injury, you should not go barefoot!

YOUR DAILY SELF-CARE REGIMEN

Pamper your feet every day

- 1 Take lukewarm footbaths (no more than 37°C), but keep them under 5 minutes! Use a mild soap.
- 2 Dry your feet thoroughly with a soft towel or disposable towel. Don't forget to dry between your toes!
- 3 Use only a natural pumice stone to treat calluses, and never a foot file or sharp blade! Brushes and massage gloves can cause a rash.
- 4 Always file your toe nails straight across. Don't use scissors, as the risk of injury is too great.
- 5 If you have corns, ingrown nails or severe calluses, have them removed by a medical foot care specialist!
- 6 Always apply enough cream to your feet, but avoid the spaces between your toes.
- 7 Never go barefoot so as to avoid injuries!
- 8 Wear a clean pair of socks every day and smooth out any creases! Choose wool socks or socks with a high cotton content.
- 9 Always check that your shoes are free of any foreign objects before putting them on!
- 10 Make sure that your shoes fit well and do not pinch your feet in any way!

Professional foot care

Hygiene and cleanliness are extremely important for diabetic foot care. Make sure that your foot care specialist always uses disinfected instruments. The removal of calluses must only be carried out with a rotary tool and not with any surgical scalpels or other metal objects.

In Austria all foot care specialists qualified to treat diabetics have a certificate and a special seal. You can get a comprehensive list of qualified foot care specialists from all of the relevant training institutions, in many clinics, doctor's offices and on our website (www.therapie-aktiv.at).

A treatment at a foot salon should never draw blood!

The right shoe is more precious than gold!

Shoes that are too tight are the most common cause of foot problems. That's why you should always make sure your shoes fit.

- ... A good shoe gives your foot enough space with regard to length, width and height. It has a sturdy sole, a low heel and soft upper part. Clogs, rubber boots and shoes with thick seams and eyelets are unsuitable.
- ... Buy shoes in the afternoon, as your feet swell a bit in the course of the day. A sports store is a good place to find suitable shoes, as athletic shoes fulfil the requirements of a well-fitting shoe.
- ... If you've had some foot injury before, you may need special shoes, e.g. fitted with a special footbed. If you have a foot malposition or missing toes, you will probably need customised orthopaedic shoes.
- ... Avoid split inlays, footbeds and reflexology inlays (danger of pressure causing blisters). Also, avoid health shoes with nodules that stimulate circulation.

- ... Only wear bath slippers with a smooth inner sole!
- ... Always examine your shoes for foreign objects before putting them on!
- ... Always wear closed shoes with socks!



FITNESS FOR YOUR FEET!

Sit on a chair in an upright position without leaning back. Your legs should be relaxed and perpendicular to the floor. Alternate between left and right when doing

these exercises and repeat each one about 10 times. You should not experience any pain when doing these exercises.



Exercise 1:
Curl your toes in and then stretch; relax your foot in-between.



Exercise 4:
Lift your heel, turn it outwards and put down again.



Exercise 2:
Lift your heel and put down again.



Exercise 5:
Take a few small steps on tip-toes, first forwards and then back again.



Exercise 3:
Lift your forefoot, turn it outwards and put it down again.



Exercise 6:
Lift a cloth with your toes.



Exercise 7:
Lift one leg, point your toes, release and lower your leg again.



Exercise 10:
Lift both legs and stretch them out, stretch your toes alternately and put your legs down again.



Exercise 8:
Lift a leg and stretch it out, stretch your toes up and towards you, relax and lower your leg again.



Exercise 11:
Crumple up a newspaper into as small a ball as you can, and smooth it out again; then try to tear it with your feet.



Exercise 9:
Lift both legs and stretch, draw circles with your feet and put your legs down again.



Exercise 12:
As a reward: massage/rub one foot with the other.



Daily exercises stimulate the circulation in your feet.