

## C-140 Diabetic Skin Care

If blood sugar is high, the body loses fluid, causing the skin to become dry. This occurs because the body is turning water into urine to remove the excess sugar from the blood. Skin can also get dry if the nerves in legs and feet do not get the message to sweat because of diabetic neuropathy. Sweating helps keep skin soft and moist.

Dry skin can become red and sore, and can crack and peel. Germs can enter through the cracks in skin and cause infection. High levels of sugar in the blood provide excellent breeding ground for bacteria and fungi, and reduce the body's ability to heal itself.

Most skin conditions can be prevented or managed if identified in time.

### Common skin problems in diabetics

- **Allergic Reactions:** Cause rashes, depressions or bumps on skin. It is very important for diabetics to check for reactions in areas where insulin is injected.
- **Atherosclerosis:** Narrowing of blood vessels from thickening of vessel walls. Can affect blood vessels throughout the body. Changes occur due to a lack of oxygen to the part of the body. Loss of hair, thin and shiny skin, thickened and discolored toenails, and cold skin are symptoms of atherosclerosis. Because blood carries the white blood cells that help fight infection, legs and feet heal slowly when injured
- **Bacterial Infections:** Infections that affect the skin include stys (infections of glands of eyelids), boils (infections of hair follicles) carbuncles (infections of skin and underlying tissue). Most require treatment with antibiotics
- **Diabetic Blisters:** Resemble burn blisters. Can occur on fingers hands, toes, feet legs or arms. Usually painless and heal on their own.
- **Diabetic Dermopathy:** Caused by changes in blood vessels. Appears as scaly patches that are light brown or red, often on front of legs. Usually no treatment necessary.
- **Digital Sclerosis:** Skin on toes, fingers and hands become thick, waxy and tight. Treatment is to control blood sugar.
- **Fungal Infections:** Yeast like fungus (*Candida albicans*) responsible for many fungal infections in diabetics. Fungus creates itchy red rashes, often surrounded by tiny blisters and scales. Moist often occur in warm moist folds of skin. Three common sites: jock itch, athletes foot, and ringworm (scaly patches that itch or blister) Ringworm can appear on feet, groin, chest and abdomen, scalp or nails. Medicines that kill fungus are used to treat.
- **Itching:** Pruritus can have many causes such as yeast infection, dry skin or poor blood flow. When caused by low blood flow, feet and legs most commonly affected. Use lotion to keep skin moist and soft and prevent itching.

**Treatment Guidelines**

- Specific to the problem - treat per physician orders.
- Controlling blood sugars is the most effective.
- Follow nutrition, exercise and medication recommendations.
- Follow good skin care.

**Related Procedures**

None

**Policy History**

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