The condition of your skin reflects your overall health and is affected by both disease and diet. For the person with diabetes, healthy skin, especially on your feet is one of the body’s most important defenses against infection and injury. In this article, we’ll review some interesting facts about skin and talk about important things you can do to keep your feet in good condition.

The top layer of skin is called the epidermis and its thickness varies over different parts of the body. For example, it is extremely thin over the eyelid (an amazing 2/1000 of an inch) but thicker in areas where it is exposed to lots of pressure and friction such as the soles of the feet. You can think of the epidermis as a protective envelope that keeps germs and harmful agents outside the body. This layer is constantly being replaced with new cells to maintain this barrier and keep skin intact and healthy.

The epidermis also contains cells that act as part of the immune system to recognize foreign substances. Skin is well supplied with blood vessels which provide nutrition for the skin. It is also richly supplied with nerves which detect heat, cold and most importantly, pain. Doctors refer to this as protective sensation.

Most people experience dry skin especially if they live in a dry or cold climate but severe dry skin can be a special problem. When your feet sweat, the moisture helps to keep skin soft. With diabetes, nerves that control sweating are often damaged so feet are deprived of their natural moisture and lubrication. The skin gets dry and cracks. Deep cracks, called fissures, can be very difficult to heal and painful. Once the skin is open, it is more susceptible to infection which can lead to serious complications. Nerve damage can also cause decreased sensation in the feet. Skin damage, such as a cut or even a puncture can occur and go unnoticed when sensation of pain or pressure is poor or absent.

Some people with diabetes also have atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries. This may decrease the circulation to the legs, and especially the feet. When circulation is reduced, any cut or opening will be more difficult to heal. If infection is present healing will be slowed or stopped.

Routine foot care is the best way to prevent foot problems. Foot care starts with keeping your skin healthy.

**Steps to healthier feet**

**Step One:**
*Keep your feet clean.* This helps to reduce the number of bacteria and fungus that can increase the risk of infection. Make sure to carefully wash between your toes. Always test bath or shower water with the back of your hand to make sure its not too hot. Foot soaks are no longer recommended as prolonged exposure to water can make skin more susceptible to damage. 3M™ Cavilion™ Skin Cleanser is a gentle liquid cleanser which does not require rinsing. It comes in an easy to handle spray bottle. This is especially helpful if getting into the bathtub or shower is difficult.

**Step Two:**
*After you wash and dry your feet, inspect them carefully* including the spaces between your toes. If you notice any sores, blisters, reddened or painful areas make an appointment with your doctor. If you have trouble with your vision ask a family member or health care professional to help you check your feet.

**Step Three:**
*Apply a moisturizer* that will replenish the skin. Moisturizers may come in the form of a lotion, oil or cream. Lotions tend to have more water content. They improve the feel and...
Other important foot care tips

- Trim your nails as directed by your doctor or diabetes specialist. Never try to cut a corn or callus or remove one with a chemical remover. Avoid using adhesive pads on your feet.

- Wear shoes that fit properly without causing pressure or rubbing. Always feel inside your shoes before you put them on. Remove any loose objects that could damage your foot.

- Going barefoot is dangerous especially if you have reduced sensation. Wear shoes when outside and slippers with protective soles when home.

- Stockings or socks should be clean and fit smoothly without bulky seams. Blood or drainage on your socks or hosiery is a sign of skin damage. Look at your feet carefully and have your doctor examine any suspicious area.

- Make sure your doctor or your diabetes specialist checks your feet at every appointment. Many people are embarrassed to have their feet examined but this is an important part of your medical care. Talk to your doctor if your feet tend to swell as this can cause pressure and lead to skin problems.

Remember that foot care is one part of an overall plan for diabetes management. It is critical that you follow your doctor’s instructions to manage blood sugar in the desired range. Follow recommendations for a healthy diet. Weight control is important for diabetes management and helps decrease pressure on your feet.

Last, but not least, it is very important that you do not smoke. Smoking causes your arteries to narrow reducing the flow of blood to tissue and skin. ‘Cutting back’ on the amount you smoke is a step in the right direction but doesn’t help your arteries as just one cigarette will affect blood flow for many hours. Talk to your doctor about how to quit.

Dry Skin Cream contains ingredients called humectants which help prevent water loss from the skin. This moisturizing cream also provides the skin with fatty substances called lipids that are necessary for a healthy epidermis. And it vanishes into the skin preventing a greasy feeling or stain on socks or hosiery.

Steps to healthier feet (con’t)

Suggested daily routine for foot care

- Wash your feet with 3M™ Cavilon™ Skin Cleanser and a soft cloth. This gentle skin cleanser does not require rinsing. If you wish, you may rinse the cleanser off your skin with plain warm, not hot, water.

- Next dry your feet carefully including the spaces between your toes.

- Apply 3M™ Cavilon Foot & Dry Skin Cream to the skin on the tops and bottoms of your feet. Gently massage the cream into the skin. Do not apply the cream between your toes as this may trap excess moisture.